

How TOLD
GRANNY THE
BIBLE STORIES

By
ELEANOR H BOYD.



Class BS551

Book .B63

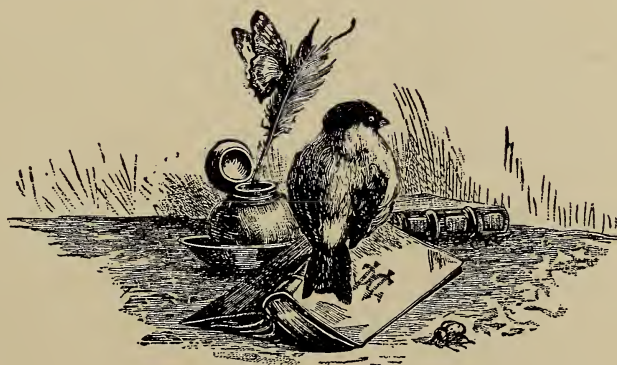
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How Granny Told the Bible Stories

BY

Eleanor H. Boyd



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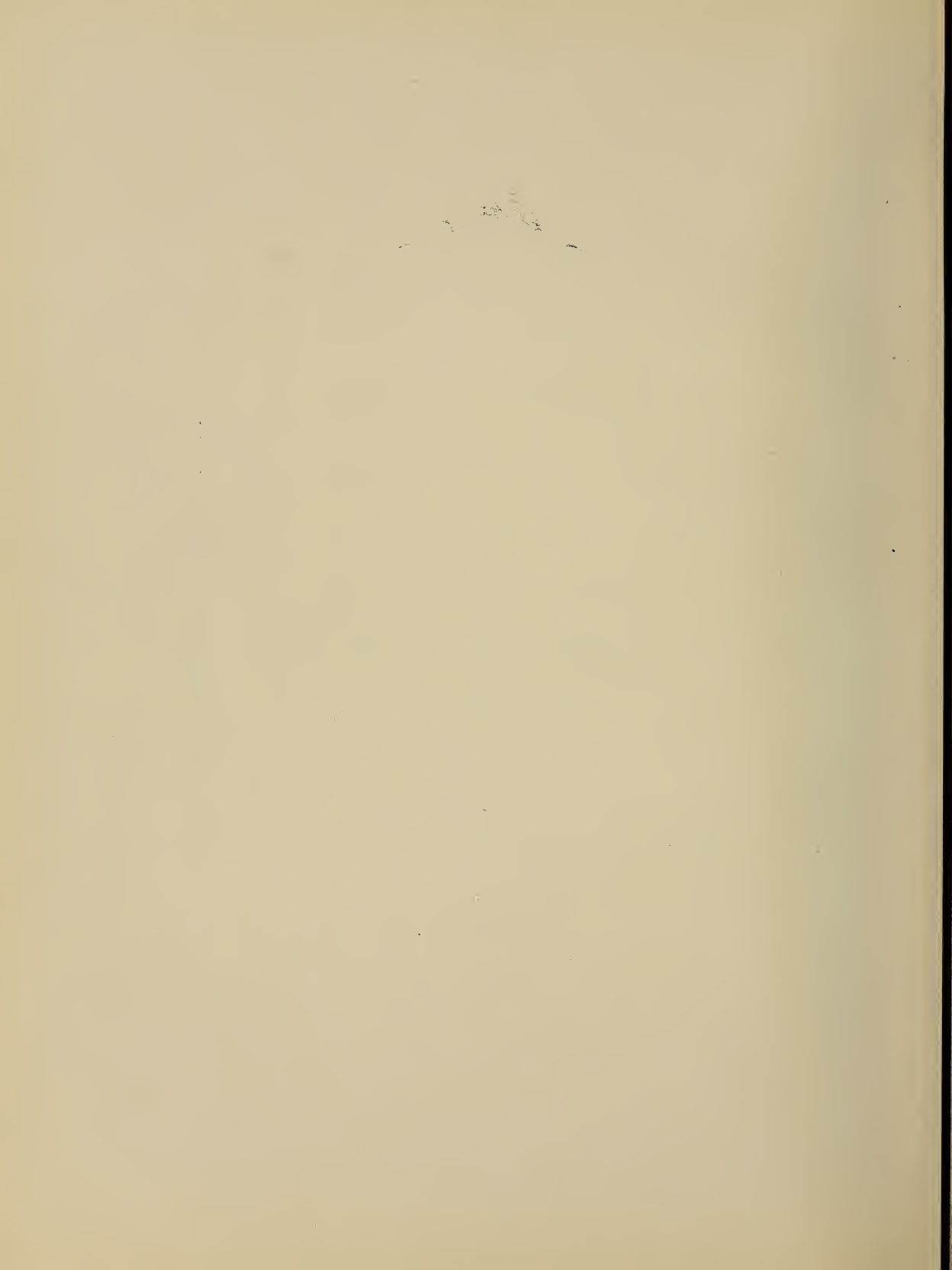
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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO
ALL CHILDREN
WHO READ THESE STORIES
AS WELL AS MY OWN
LITTLE PEOPLE
FOR WHOM
THEY WERE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN.





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A MESSAGE FROM GRANNY TO ALL THE CHILDREN WHO READ THESE STORIES.

Dear Children:—



HOPE you will like these stories, because they have been written just for you.

If you do like them, and will send me a letter, telling me which one you like best and why, perhaps next time I may be able to do better.

The best thing about them is that they are true, and that God who helped all the people in them is our Father too, the same yesterday, to-day and forever, and if you ask Him He will help you as He did Joseph and David, Ruth and Esther, Samson and Daniel and all the others.

Most of all I hope you will love and trust the Lord Jesus always, and pray to Him every day, so that you may one day meet the people I have been telling you about, and they will then be able to tell you these stories far better than I have.

A letter addressed to—

Mrs. John Y. Boyd,

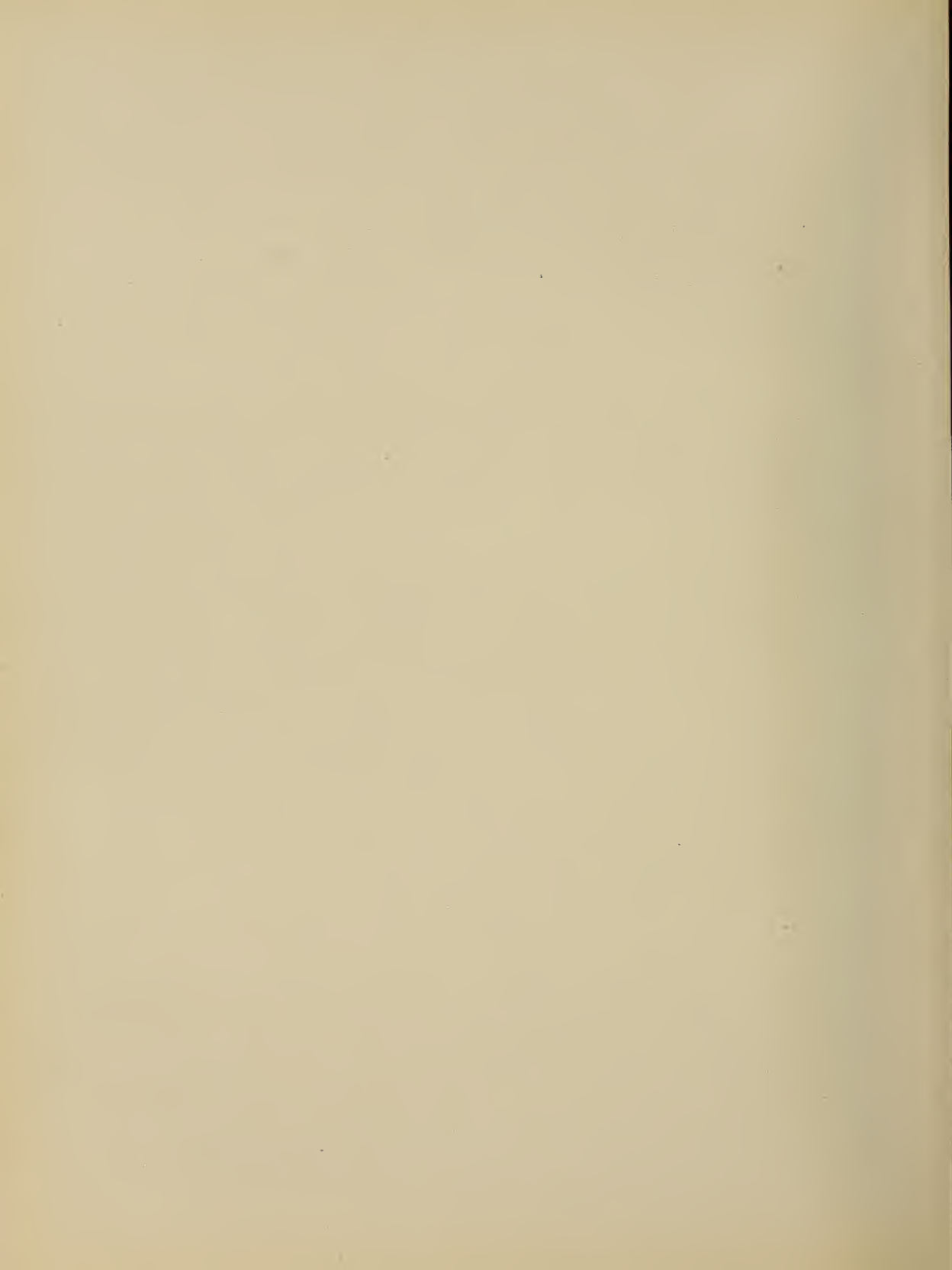
124 Pine Street,

Harrisburg, Penna.

will always reach "Granny."

Your friend,

"GRANNY."



EXPLANATION FOR GROWN-UPS.



AN attempt has been made in the recasting for children, of these matchless Bible Stories to bring them to the level of the child's understanding.

To make the figures real people, to give spirited and dramatic action which the child can sense, and to faithfully portray the customs and scenes of the Orient as well as to emphasize the spiritual truths contained in the story.

As a child does not readily grasp an abstract statement, it has been deemed permissible, to insert concrete illustrations, even when not asserted in that particular story, but elsewhere inferred in the Scriptures.

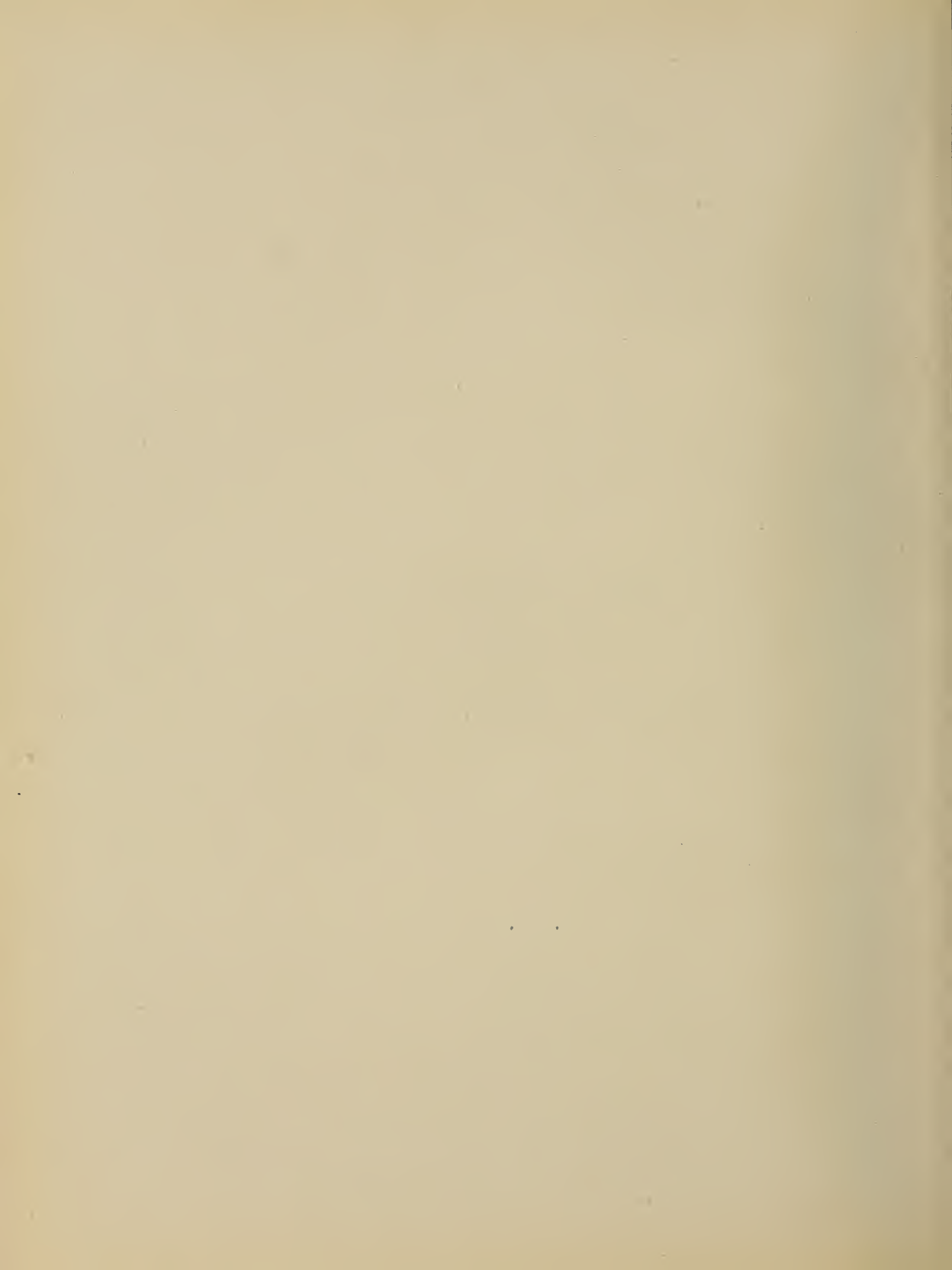
That these stories may lead the children, to whom they are read, to love the God who is revealed in them, and later to search the Scriptures for themselves, is the earnest wish of the Grandmother who wrote them for her own little people.

STORY NO. 1.

THE LITTLE MAID

OR

A SLAVE GIRL'S SERVICE



THE LITTLE MAID

OR

A SLAVE GIRL'S SERVICE.



ONCE upon a time there lived in a country far, far from here a Little Maid. It was a country where the sky was bluer than any sapphire you have ever seen, and the clouds whiter than any soap-suds, and the green grass and trees, greener than any grass or trees in our country, even in June, and the yellow sand yellower than the corn tassels in summer.

And oh! the flowers that grew in this country where the Little Maid lived. Such fields of red and yellow lilies, such pink and white roses, such acres and acres of wild flowers. There were blue lilies-of-the-valley, white and yellow daisies, scarlet anemones, and poppies of every hue. The stars at night were brighter than any diamonds, and the moon made the night almost as light as the day.

The Little Maid lived on the edge of a village where she could see all this beauty every day. When her work was done at noon, she would gather flowers, and at night watch the stars shine out one by one until her mother would tell her it was time to go to bed.

She lived in such a funny little house and slept in such a funny little bed. I must tell you about them, because they were so different from anything you or I have ever seen.

The house was made of mud and plaster and looked like a square box. It was flat on top with a stone staircase going up on the outside, and in one corner of the flat roof was a low room, also built of mud, which was the guest room. You must remember about this, for we shall hear more of it later in the story.

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We call our guest room the spare-room, do we not? But in that country they called it "the upper room," because it was built in one corner of the flat roof. The rest of the roof was used as a porch, where the family sat on hot nights, and watched the stars, and listened to the bleat of the sheep, that grazed on the hills about the little town.

It never grows very dark in that country where the Little Maid lived, because, as I said before, the stars are brighter there, than with us, and the moon looks bigger and sheds a soft silvery light which makes the night almost as bright as day.

But when it rains—and it sometimes rains in that country—then the Little Maid had to light her lamp in the evening, and it was such a funny little lamp, I doubt if you have ever seen one like it.

It was a small flat clay pitcher, with a wide spout in which lay a tiny piece of tow. The dish was filled with olive oil, the wick was lighted by a coal from the fire, and then the lamp was placed on a high lamp-stand in the center of the room, and you would be surprised to see how much light it gave.

When it was time to go to bed, the Little Maid's mother used to lay a long, thin rug, or mat, on the floor, and the Little Maid would take off her sandals, and laying aside her long outer dress, would lie down on the rug on the hard floor, and pulling the rest of the rug over her feet, would go to sleep as comfortably and soundly as you do in your soft bed, because, you see, she was used to it.

She was really, as we say, "as snug as a bug in a rug."

Sometimes when the nights were very hot she would carry her rug up to the roof and sleep there, and when she was wakeful and could not sleep, she would listen to the sheep bells tinkling as the sheep nibbled the short grass in the moonlight, and she would repeat the words her mother had taught her, which you all know and probably also say at night when you cannot sleep, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Sometimes it would be "He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." And

when she had said this she would feel safe and happy, and soon fall asleep again.

You see the Little Maid's father and mother knew and loved God, and had taught her to know and to love Him too, and always to pray to Him if she felt afraid or was tempted to do wrong.

The Prophet of God, in that country, was Elisha, the one who knew God best of all and gave His messages to the people. The Little Maid knew him well as he was always her father's guest when he came to the village.

Then it was that the Little Maid had to prepare the "upper room" for the Man of God. She dusted it out with her little broom, made of stiff rushes, she put a lamp-stand in it with a nicely trimmed wick in the lamp, so it would not smoke when the Prophet tried to read the Word of God. Then she also placed a tall clay pitcher of nice fresh water on a little bench, with a clay basin, and a clean linen towel beside it, so the Prophet could wash his hands before he came down to supper.

The Little Maid had often heard the Prophet tell of God's love for His people, and His constant care over them no matter what evil befell them.

She used to wonder how that could be, but she knew if the Man of God said so it must be true.

Often the Prophet would teach her a new prayer and after supper they would all stand facing the open door that looked towards the east, where their temple stood away off in Jerusalem, and repeat together "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

But now I must tell you of the dreadful thing that happened to this happy family and the dear Little Maid who was the sunshine of it, and how God used their sorrow for His glory.

One night the whole village was roused by the noise of stamping horses, shouting men, and the flare of blazing torches, which the soldiers carried in their hands. It was a band of Syrian soldiers, the worst enemy of the Israelites, and they carried away captive every one in the village—

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men, women and children—carried them away to be slaves in a far-off country. The poor Little Maid was lifted in front of a soldier on horse-back, separated from her father and mother, whom she never saw again, and the last sight she had of her little home was the blaze of the burning village, for those wicked soldiers burned it to the ground.

Her heart nearly broke and she wept bitter tears, although the soldier was not unkind to her.

The poor Little Maid could not stop crying, however, nor eat the food which the soldier offered her. The only thing she could do, was to repeat the prayer the Man of God had taught her: "Hear my cry, oh God; for trouble is nigh. Oh make haste to help me; for I am in the hands of mine enemy."

And she repeated her little prayer over and over again, and God heard and answered.

The way He answered her was this; when the soldier who was carrying her away in front of him on his horse, saw the spires of his city glittering in the distance, he made up his mind, that in place of taking her to the market square, to be sold like a slave on the auction-block, and perhaps be bought by some cruel taskmaster, he would take her straight to his General's wife, who was a very kind woman, and there the Little Maid at least would have a good home.

It was God who worked upon the rough soldier's heart, and led him to do this, because in spite of all the sorrow and fright that had come into the Little Maid's life, God **was** watching over her and taking care of her, and had a special work for her to do for Him in this General's home.

So the soldier carried her to the General's wife to be her little slave girl.

Everything in her new home was very different from her old. Here she was in a large city, the noise of which fairly frightened her, accustomed as she had been to the quiet of her little village. And then the house was a very grand one—built of colored bricks, gay and bright. Indoors there was a courtyard with a fountain in the center and birds in

cages and flowers growing all around. The rooms opened on to this court from a porch, under which one could walk and keep cool in the evening or when the sun, which was intensely hot, was shining overhead. On the floor of the rooms were thick, warm rugs, very different from the hard clay floor this little girl was used to, and in place of the one little oil lamp, on the lamp-stand, there were dozens of wonderful glass lamps, of many colors, shedding a soft light in the room very much like a rainbow. Oh! it was all very beautiful—very wonderful and very grand—but it was not home.

So while the Little Maid had plenty to eat, and beautiful new clothes to wear, and was treated kindly, yet she was dreadfully homesick, and she cried herself to sleep every night and could not be comforted.

Three times a day, however she opened her little window towards her own country, and, as she had been taught, prayed looking towards the place of prayer—the Holy Temple—in Jerusalem, and standing there with hands folded, she repeated over and over again “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,” and always added the words, “Hear my cry, oh God. Make haste to help me.”

God answered her prayer by making her see one day that her Mistress, who had beautiful clothes, a lovely house, servants to wait upon her, everything to make her happy—was more wretched and more unhappy than even she—the little slave girl who waited upon her. When the Little Maid saw this she set her wits to work to see how she could help her unhappy Mistress and thus forgot her own grief.

Now we will see what made the General’s wife so unhappy and how the little slave girl cured her sorrow.

The duties of our Little Maid, were to fix the flowers in the vases, to trim the lights in the lamps, to feed the birds in the cages, and to wait upon her Mistress when called. Morning and evening she brushed and braided her Mistress’ long black hair. Often while she was doing this she would see the tears rolling down her Mistress’ cheeks; and this distressed her and made her wonder what was the cause of her tears. One

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day she ventured to say, "Oh, my Mistress, what makes you so sad? It grieves me to see you weep." And the General's wife, who had learned to love and to trust her, replied; "Oh, little slave girl, you weep sometimes because you have been taken away from your home, and your father and your mother, and yet you are happier than I, who have everything around me to make me happy. But **things**, no matter how many or how beautiful, never make any one happy if the heart is sore. You in your little mud house were far happier than I in my palace, because you had those you loved about you. But I—I cannot have the one I love come near me. The General, my husband, whom I love dearly and who loves me, dare not come into this house, dare not touch my hand, dare not eat at the same table with me, must live alone, waited on by slaves who never leave him, because he is—a leper."

And the lady sobbed and cried and buried her face on the Little Maid's shoulder, when she crept up beside her, and slipped her hand into her Mistress', to try and comfort her.

Instantly the Little Maid thought of the Prophet of God back in her own country and she said to her Mistress, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy."

The Little Maid had never told a lie, because she was a child of God, so her Mistress believed her, and I do not know how she did it, but wives have a way of making their husbands do what they wish, and she finally won the General's consent to the little slave girl's plan. She told him what the Little Maid had said and that she was a truthful child, and she kept nagging at the General until to please her, he promised he would go to the Little Maid's country and see whether what she said was true.

You have all heard the story of the lion and the mouse. How a great big lion was once caught in the forest in a net, which some hunters had spread for him, and while he was roaring with fear, and could not get out, a tiny little mouse crept up beside him and said, "Oh, Mr. Lion, if

you will allow so small a thing as I am to help you, I think I can get you out of your trouble." And the big lion, who would have eaten up the little mouse in one mouthful if he had not been in such trouble, was only too thankful to let the little mouse help him in his own way. And so the story goes, that what the big lion with all his strength could not do, the tiny little mouse with his skill, was able to do, and he nibbled away at the great cords of the net until the lion was free from his prison, and could bound away safe and sound into the jungle.

So we see the littlest things in the world can often do more than the biggest things, and the case of the little slave girl and the great General Naaman is a case like that of the lion and the mouse.

The big General was like the lion caught in a net he could not get out of, and the little slave girl was like the mouse that delivered him.

In order to take this long journey, to test the cure, it was necessary for the General to ask the King's permission, because he was such a great General that if he left the kingdom it might all go to pieces in his absence; and at any rate, generals are just like other officers, they cannot do as they please, but must ask permission if they wish to leave the country or to take a holiday or to go on a long journey.

The King of Syria was so eager to have his great and brave General cured of his leprosy, that he not only gave him permission to take the journey, but had the Court Secretaries prepare a long scroll written on both sides with the King's message, telling the King of Israel how good and brave General Naaman was, and how he the King of Syria, had heard that he the King of Israel could cure leprosy. You see, they all overlooked the fact that the Little Maid had never mentioned the King of Israel but only Elisha the Prophet of God.

So the King of Syria, in his letter, told the King of Israel, what a favor it would be if he would cure the General of his leprosy, and promised he would always be friends with him, and fight for him in place of against him, if he would grant him this request.

Then they rolled the long piece of parchment on a scroll (for that was

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the way they wrote their letters in those days) and tied it round and round with all kinds of red tape, and sealed it over and over with big red and yellow seals, and stamped the King's crest upon the seals, and put it in a round clay cylinder—something like a pipe—and wrapped the clay cylinder in a big sheepskin rug, and hung it in a basket on the side of a little white mule. A Secretary was sent with it to ride on the mule, and to see that it was safely delivered into the hands of the King of Israel.

When the **very** important letter was ready, the General set out one fine, sunny day, to visit the King of Israel to be cured of his leprosy.

You must not think of General Naaman as going on horseback alone, with just the Secretary on the little white mule bearing the precious letter in the basket. No, indeed; General Naaman was too grand a man to travel that way.

But the way he traveled was so different from the way we travel to-day, that I must describe it to you, so you can see the picture for yourself.

In the first place, the General was a very rich man and a very proud one, who never took favors from any one. So he was going to pay handsomely for his cure. He had nearly \$30,000 in silver brought from the bank, and a whole big pile of gold besides—oh, I do not know how much—thousands of dollars—and ten magnificent suits of clothes, silks and satins and linens and furs, long robes of every color, underclothes, sandals, and many rich and rare and beautiful things which they used to wear in those days.

These were carefully packed on the backs of camels—rows and rows of camels—and the bags of gold and silver were slung in the wicker baskets on the sides of the little white mules—rows and rows of little white mules—and then he had dozens and dozens of soldiers who rode ahead of him to guard him, all shining in leather helmets, with bows and arrows slung by their sides. Gay banners floating over them, and trumpeteers blowing on their trumpets to get them all in line. Then came a long line of chariots. You know what they looked like. Yes, it was just like a circus parade, only this was a real one, because it was not made up of

paint and artificial tinsel just to look gay. It was all real and grand and beautiful. It certainly took a great deal of trouble and a great deal of money for the General to get ready for his cure. We will see later what all his efforts amounted to.

In these chariots drawn by beautiful gray and brown horses, rode a number of grand gentlemen who went along as an escort—friends of the General's who wanted to see if the King of Israel really could cure leprosy. In the center of the whole procession rode the General himself on the blackest, most superb horse you ever saw.

The harness was embroidered in brilliant colors and studded with glittering gems. The tail was tightly bound around with vari-colored ribbons and the golden chains of the bridle rattled and clanked as his horse pranced up and down, just as you have seen circus horses prance, when they hear the music.

The General himself looked magnificent. His jet black beard, tightly curled and richly perfumed waved in the breeze under his shining helmet. His coat of mail glistened in the sunlight and was only partially concealed by his bright, red cloak which floated out behind him like a banner. Two short swords richly jeweled hung by his side, while bows and arrows were slung across his back and the wide, leather bracelet, worn by all archers of that day, could be seen bound about his right wrist. Upon his breast glittered all the jeweled orders of his country and altogether you would have to go far to find a more imposing figure than that of General Naaman as he was about to start on his long journey across the desert to visit the King of Israel.

Everybody in the city of Damascus was out to see the General start on his long journey. I do not wonder, for you never saw such a sight in your life, and the Little Maid and the General's wife stood in the doorway to watch them go.

At last everything was ready and the trumpeteers sounded a loud blast; the camel drivers prodded the camels with their thick wooden sticks; the mule drivers shouted and cracked their whips; the charioteers pulled

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up their horses; and the General's horse pranced round and round livelier than ever; and everybody shouted "Good-by!" and "Good luck!" for they all loved the General and wanted him to get well. Then the General waved good-by to his wife (you see, being a leper he could not kiss her), and they were off. And the Little Maid and her Mistress went indoors to weep, and to pray, and to wait.

Now we must hurry on and see what happened when this wonderful cavalcade reached the capital city of Israel.

What a stir they made in that old town when they arrived. Everyone turned out to see the procession, and while it was somewhat dust-covered, from the long, hot ride across the desert, still it was a wonderful parade when it swept into town and drew up before the King's palace.

Then the letter was brought out of its wicker basket, where it had lain safely all this while, and with great ceremony was carried in to the King.

The King cut all the red tape at a single stroke of his sword, broke all the red and yellow seals at once, read the letter, turned pale as a sheet, rent his clothes and turning to his Wise Men who were gathered around him said: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me."

You will remember the Little Maid never had said a single word about sending the General to the King of her country. She had said Elisha the Prophet of God. But like so many other people, the General and the King of Syria made the great mistake of thinking God only worked through important people. Whereas the truth is God very seldom uses important people for His work.

So it was in this story. The King did not know God, or how to cure this General of his leprosy. But there was a man living down a little back street who did know God, and did know how to cure the General of his leprosy, and because a little slave girl was praying and asking God to heal this General, God was planning to answer her prayer.

When the procession rode into town as I told you, the whole town

turned out to see it, and among those who ran alongside, asking what it all meant, was the servant of the great Prophet Elisha, who lived down the little back street. As soon as the servant heard the news he immediately ran back and told the Prophet, that the great General Naaman from Syria, who was a leper, had come to the King of Israel to be cured, and was now waiting outside the palace gate.

So when the King was just about to call the General in and tell him he could do nothing for him, the servant of the Prophet of God appeared at the palace door and asked to be admitted to the presence of the King, saying he had an important message to deliver from his Master, Elisha, the Prophet of Israel, a message which would help him in his perplexity. The King was so glad to have anyone throw light on this dark subject, that he immediately admitted the servant who delivered the following message from his master: "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

You may be sure the King was only too glad to shift the responsibility of the whole matter and immediately sent the General and his retinue down to the little back street where the Prophet Elisha lived. So a second time the cavalcade drew up before a door, this time not the door of a palace, but the right place, the door of the house of a Man of God.

How the street was jammed and packed with camels and mules and chariots and people! That little back street had never seen such a sight before in its life. The General sat on his horse straight and proud and haughty—for all he was a leper—waiting for the Prophet to come out and to perform his great miracle of healing. But the Prophet did not come out, and did not then and there perform the great miracle of healing. Instead he sent his servant down to this proud and haughty General to say to him: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."

Perhaps the General was not angry. He was just furious. He, the greatest General of all Syria, to be told to take a bath, as if he was a dirty boy, and a bath in the muddy, turbid waters of the river Jordan.

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Why, if a bath was all that was necessary, he had better rivers at home in which to wash, rivers of crystal clearness, rivers to be proud of; he had not taken this long, hot, dusty, expensive journey across the desert to be told like a naughty child that all he needed was a mud bath.

He raged, and fumed, and scolded, and said: "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage."

He certainly was furious, and because of his pride, and his self-opinion, and his anger he very nearly lost his cure.

But just as the General was turning away in a rage, two of his young soldiers stepped up to him, and said something that was very sensible: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

Finally the General listened to reason, and the whole cavalcade clattered down the street again, and out through the city, on down to the river Jordan's bank.

Oh, my! it was a nasty, angry muddy looking stream. But the Prophet had said Jordan, and those beautiful, clear rivers back in his own heathen land would not do. Do you know why? Because it was a question of obedience to the voice of God, and of being humble and trustful, as you will see from what the General now had to do.

In place of the Prophet making a great show of the miracle, and adding to the General's pride and haughtiness, when he came to muddy Jordan's bank, he had first to get down off his high horse, then unbuckle his war-like armor, then take off his robes of state and glittering decorations, and then he had to take off all his undergarments, until as a mere man, stripped of every earthly thing, and a leper into the bargain, he had to step into the sullen stream, and had to go down under its turbid waters.

Seven times the General had to go under. Over and over again. Until he had completed the number given him by the Prophet. I wonder if he got discouraged when nothing happened.

Once under, no cure. "Down again, my father," the young men who were helping him said. Twice, no cure. Down again. Three times, no cure. Down again. Down, and down, and down again, until the seventh time. When lo! and behold! **then**, after perfect obedience, the General came up and every leprous spot had vanished and his skin was as clean, and white, and healthy as a newborn child's.

What a shout went up from all the people lined along the bank when they saw the General step out of the water cured. The tears were streaming down his own cheeks, he was so overjoyed. He could hardly believe it; but every time he looked at the place where the old sores had been, he saw the new skin, clear and fresh, with not a scar to mar it. He was perfectly cured and there was not a trace of the old disease upon him.

So Jesus cures, and not a sign of our sins is ever left anywhere, for anybody, not even God, to see. Is it not worth coming to Him for that?

Then they burned all the clothes he had worn, which were infected, and dressed him again in one of the ten beautiful suits he had brought with him, and he rode back to the Prophet's door, looking much as he had done before, but oh! with such a different heart beating underneath his uniform. It was a humble, thankful heart now. You know Jesus says when He cures He gives us a new heart and a new spirit. When we are cured of sin we feel differently and we act differently towards everyone.

So the General's heart was changed. This time he got down from his horse and knelt at the Prophet's feet, for this time the Prophet came out to speak to him and to point him to God, who had been the One to cure him.

The General offered him all the silver and gold and raiment which he had brought with him to pay for his cure, but the man of God refused everything, because the gift of God is without money and without price.

Then the General said, "Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to

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thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD."

And because he was trying to do right in his poor heathen way, the Prophet granted his request, and enough earth was put into bags on the sides of two mules, to be carried back to Syria to make a little altar there to the only true God, that all men might know their General worshipped Him who alone had been able to cure him of his leprosy.

I wish you could have seen the welcome which the General received from his wife and the Little Maid when he reached home again, when this time he could take his dear wife in his arms, and kiss the Little Maid who had brought about his recovery.

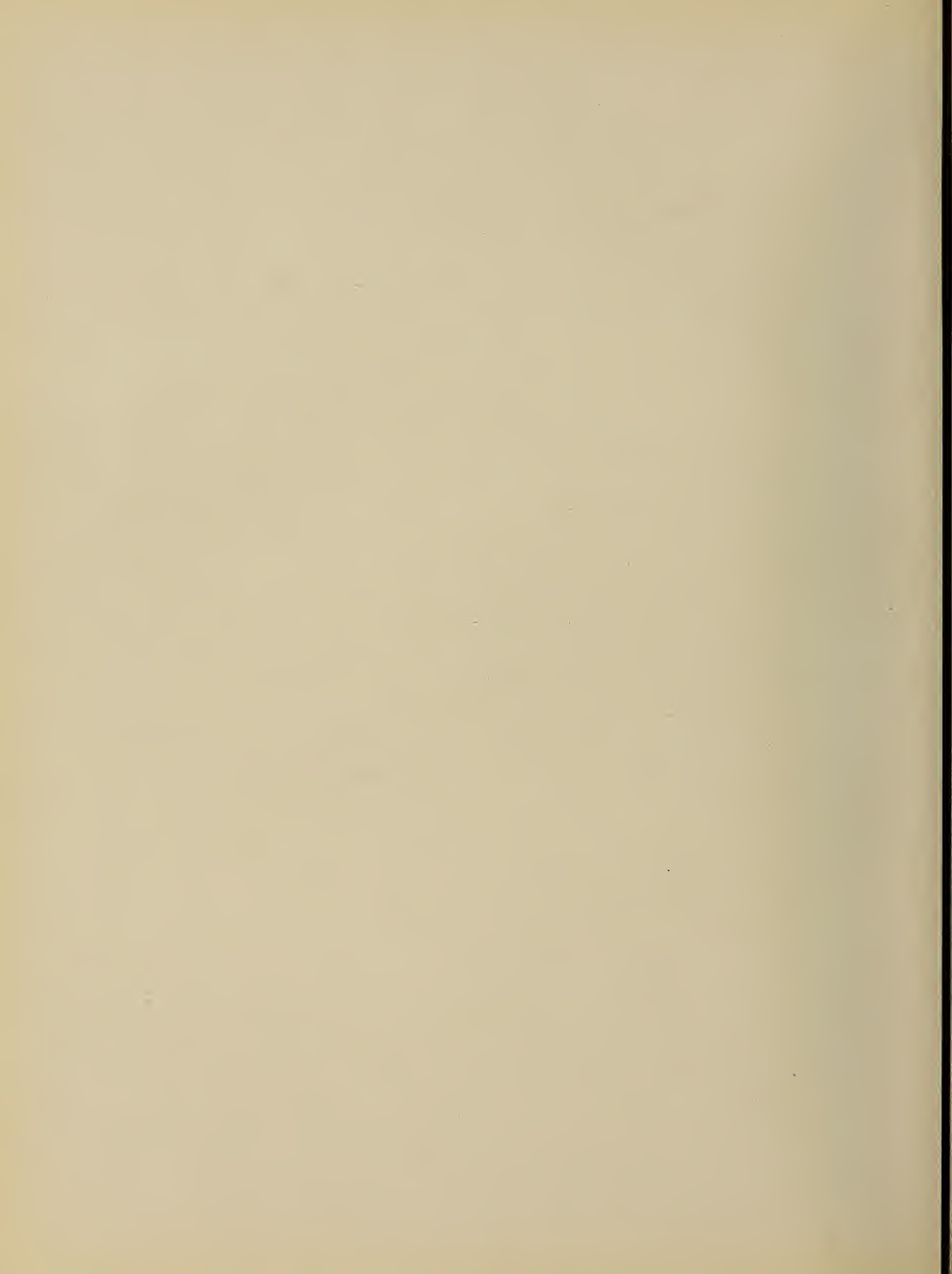
Today the Little Maid, the great General, his wife, the Prophet of Israel, are all safe and happy in God's home in Heaven, and oh! how glad the Little Maid is now that God had her carried away captive, and used her to cure her Master's leprosy, and her Mistress' tears, and to bring them and others to know, and to love, the only true God. Some day we will see them all, and ask them to tell us this wonderful story, far better than I have been able to tell it to you to-day.

STORY NO. 2.

JOSEPH

OR

FROM PRISON TO PALACE.

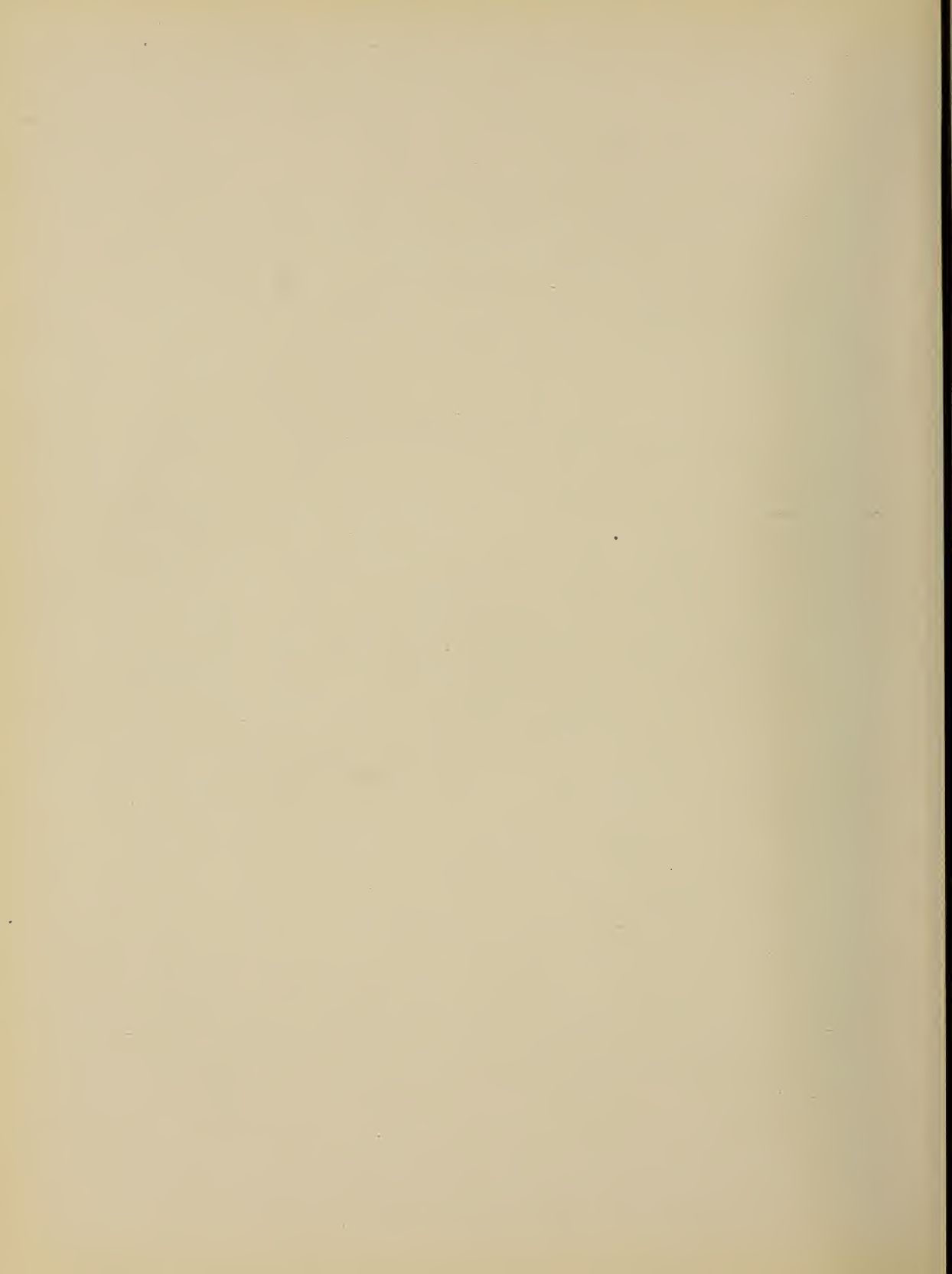




CHARIOT DE DIEU LE GRAND NILE 46

Le dieu Nout, son épouse et son fils devant le roi Thoutmose III

James Tissot



JOSEPH

OR

FROM PRISON TO PALACE.



ONCE upon a time there was a little lad who had ten older brothers. His older brothers were rough and wicked and made life very hard for him. But this boy was a fine lad, and while he always refused to do the evil things his brothers were doing, he tried to be friends with them, and to help them with their work. But as his father loved him better than the other boys, because he could trust him more, he gave him a different kind of work, and made him wear a different kind of coat, to make this distinction. You see, the brothers tended sheep, and wore rough clothes like the skins of animals for their rough work. But as this boy helped his father in the house, his father gave him a long white linen coat, with bands of many colored embroideries on it, to distinguish him from his shepherd brothers, and this, made the brothers hate him more than ever.

One night the boy had a dream. He dreamed he had a sheaf of wheat and his brothers each had a sheaf of wheat, and their sheaves bowed down to his sheaf. In the morning the boy was foolish enough to tell them about his dream and that made them hate him more than ever. A second time when he dreamed that the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him, even his father became provoked with him and said: "What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?"—and his eleven brothers envied and hated him the more. Then as they were

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very wicked and cruel men, they planned to get rid of him forever by killing him.

They waited a long time before any opportunity came, but one day, when they were far away from home, tending sheep, they saw this younger brother coming across the fields looking for them.

They knew him by the white coat, with its many colored bands, and because they had been so long a time away from home, they knew their father had sent him to find them and bring them food. "And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams." So when this poor little fellow, who had never done them any harm in his life, and had taken this long, long walk in order to bring them food, came up to them, they seized him and threw him into an old empty well which was near by, and then sat down to eat the good things which he had brought, and decide how best they could kill him.

There was only one brother among them who did not wish to kill him. While they were all quarreling about it, a party of slave drivers came along, and they decided that they could get rid of him without killing him by selling him to one of the drivers as a slave, and so have him taken away off, down to a foreign country, where they would never see or hear of him again; and that is what they did.

But before they let him go, they took off his coat of many colors, and when he was gone, they killed one of their goats and dipped the coat in the blood, and carried it back to their poor old father, and made him believe that some wild animal had killed his darling boy.

Oh, they were very wicked men, and I am glad we can stop talking about them for a while and follow Joseph's story.

When Joseph was down in that old well and thought these wicked brothers were going to kill him, at first he wept, and pleaded, and begged them not to hurt him, because he never had done any harm to any one of them, and of course, he did not **want** to die.

He soon saw there was no use trying to plead with those wicked brothers, but suddenly he remembered something his mother had taught him when he was a little boy, learning to say his prayers, and it was this; "What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee. In God have I put my trust; I will not fear what man can do unto me."

He had never thought those words meant anything very much when he learned them. But down in that old well they just meant everything to him, and right away he stopped crying and pleading with his brothers and commenced to tell his Heavenly Father all about his trouble, and asked **Him** to take care of him. And do you know, it was just then that those slave drivers came along and Joseph was saved from dying, because God had heard and answered his prayer.

Perhaps you think you would about as soon be dead as be sold as a slave; but God was watching over Joseph and had some very important work for him to do for Him in Egypt, the foreign country to which he was going.

So Joseph was taken out of the old well and sent into Egypt, and sold there as a slave. A great General bought him for his servant, and found him so obedient and willing to work, that the General took a great fancy to him, and one day when he was going away on a long journey he told Joseph he would give him the keys to all the storehouses, and put all the other servants under him. He gave him full charge during his absence. Joseph thanked God for the General's confidence, and tried his best to take good care of everything until his return. Then what do you think happened?

When the General returned his wife went to him and told him the meanest, nastiest story about Joseph, not a word of which was true. But, of course, the General believed his wife, and would not even listen to poor Joseph's defense, but clapped him right into prison and left him there.

Now this was nearly as bad as being in the old well. But Joseph had learned a good deal more about God since then and this time he at once

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asked Him to help him do what was right and to have him released as soon as He thought best.

You see Joseph knew the General would find out some day that the stories which his wife had told about him were all lies.

As soon as he was imprisoned he behaved himself so well that the jailer soon allowed him go around and help with the other prisoners. In this way he met a Butler and a Baker, who had been in the King's employ, and now we will see why God had permitted Joseph to be sent to prison.

God was getting everything ready to give Joseph the work for which He had sent him to Egypt, and He had permitted Joseph to be put in prison in order to meet this Butler and Baker, because He was going to use one of these men to bring him before the King.

You must not think of the Butler and Baker to the King as running around in a cap and apron, baking bread and serving at the table. No indeed! In those days a Butler and a Baker to a King were very grand people indeed, and did very little work.

The Baker wore a wonderful uniform, and superintended all the buying of the meats and provisions for the King's table, while the Butler also wore a wonderful uniform, and all the work he ever did was to hand the King his goblet of wine on a silver tray, tasting it first to see that it was not poisoned.

Both these men had offended the King and had been sent to prison, where they each had a very strange dream, and as in those days dreams always meant something, they were dreadfully worried until they found out what their dream meant.

No one in the prison could tell them the meaning, until Joseph heard about it, when he said, "Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you." So they told their dreams to Joseph; and this is what they were. The Butler dreamed of a vine with three branches each bearing a bunch of grapes. These he squeezed into the King's silver cup and offered to the King to drink. Joseph told him the three branches

meant three days, after which he would be taken out of prison and restored to his former position as cup-bearer to the King. When this happened Joseph said: "But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon."

Then, when the Baker saw that Joseph gave a good interpretation of the Butler's dream, he wished Joseph to tell him what his dream meant also. He said he had dreamed of three baskets on his head, one on top of the other, and in the topmost basket were all kinds of baked meats. These the birds snatched away and ate. Joseph said the three baskets meant also three days, after which the Baker would be hung and the birds of the air would eat his flesh. And it all turned out just as Joseph had foretold. In three day Pharaoh, the King, had a birthday, and on that day he restored the Butler as his Cup-bearer, and hung the Baker. But do you know, that mean, ungrateful Butler never remembered Joseph and his promise to him for two whole years.

But God had not forgotten Joseph, though it certainly did look a good deal like it at times.

Joseph's duties were to clean the prison every day and wait upon the prisoners and do many things he had never done before. But one thing his mother had taught him, and that was to do his duty. So he cleaned the prison thoroughly, and treated the prisoners kindly, and prayed every night and every morning to God.

At last, one day, two years after he had told the Butler and the Baker the meaning of their dreams there was a great scurrying around the prison, the keeper was heard calling up and down the corridors for "Joseph! Joseph!" and when he found him there was great excitement because a messenger from the King—the great Pharaoh—had arrived, demanding that Joseph, the prison slave, be brought to the palace immediately.

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Now Kings, you know, have to be obeyed instantly, or else off comes your head. So everyone turned in to help get Joseph ready.

He washed up as quickly as he could. One prisoner shaved him, another loaned him his sandals—you see, being a slave, he had to work in his bare feet—another provided suitable clothing, for, you know, every one is obliged to dress in his best if he is to appear in the presence of a King. So all the prisoners to whom Joseph had been kind, loaned him what they could, and in a short time he was ready to go before the King. As they did not have taxis or automobiles in those days, but only chariots drawn by prancing horses which you now see in circus-parades, it was in one of these they whisked Joseph off to the palace.

When he arrived there was even more excitement and scurrying around than there had been in the prison.

Here all the big men of the kingdom—the Wise Men, the Politicians and Professors, the Statesmen and Astrologers—were nearly distracted because the King had had a dream and commanded them to tell its meaning or he threatened to cut off the heads of everyone of them before night-fall.

Not a man of them had an inkling of what the dream meant and they all thought they would be dead before night if they could not find some one to tell the King the meaning of his dream. Suddenly the Butler, whose dream Joseph had interpreted in the prison two years before, remembered that, and clapping his hands on his knees, shouted to the other distracted courtiers, "I do remember my faults this day: Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, both me and the chief baker: And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to his dream he did interpret. And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged."

So you see God had been watching Joseph all the time, and He was ready now to have Joseph begin the work for which He had sent him down to Egypt.

When the courtiers hurried Joseph into the presence of the King, Joseph, who had been well brought up by his mother, and who had asked God to help him do and say the right thing, made a very low bow and stood quietly and reverently awaiting the King's command.

As soon as the King saw him, he said: "I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it; and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." So Pharaoh told Joseph his strange dream in which he had seen seven fat cows come up in a meadow and eat grass, and after them came up seven thin cows, and ate up the fat cows, and all the grass, so that there was nothing left, and yet they remained just as thin as ever.

Again in his dream the King saw seven big fat ears of corn growing on a stalk, and after them came seven thin, withered ears which completely swallowed up the fat ears, and yet the thin ears remained as thin as ever.

Now those were strange dreams, were they not? But God had a meaning in them and Joseph understood instantly what God meant by them. He interpreted the dream to the King telling him that Egypt was going to have seven years of big, fat harvests, but they would be followed by seven years of famine. Both dreams meant the same thing, and Joseph suggested that the King would be wise to appoint a reliable man to store up the corn during the good years, and so be able to sell it at a low cost to the poor people during the seven years of famine.

Now that was a very shrewd business suggestion of Joseph's and the King immediately saw the wisdom of it and that Joseph was a good deal more reliable and more clever than any of those stupid Politicians who could not even tell what his dream meant, and who were always looking

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out for themselves, anyway, and stealing his money in place of saving it for him

So he made up his mind in a hurry and did exactly what God had planned long ago he should do; he made Joseph that Governor, who should gather up all the corn and store it in storehouses against the years of famine.

You can imagine the astonishment and chagrin of all the Courtiers, and the Prison Keeper, and the Prisoners, and the General, who had put Joseph in prison on a false charge, and the General's wife, who had lied about Joseph and had so cruelly imprisoned him, when they heard that Joseph was to be made Governor over Egypt.

Then the King put royal robes upon him; and gave him the great official seal of the kingdom; and chariots and horses; and caused him to ride in the place of honor in all the big processions directly behind the King himself.

Now do you see what God had had in mind for Joseph when He allowed him to be sold as a slave to go down to Egypt?

God was preparing him to be Governor of all Egypt and so to save the lives of millions of people, and of his own father and brothers as well.

Joseph was just as faithful as Governor as he had been as a slave. After the seven years of plenty had passed, and Joseph had gathered the surplus corn into great barns all over the country, when the famine came, he commenced to sell off the grain at reasonable prices and thus he kept the people alive, just as he had foretold the King it could be done.

He was now the second greatest man in the kingdom, and had a palace all to himself, and wore gorgeous clothes, and had a lovely wife, and two beautiful little boys; and you would have thought he would have been the happiest man in all the world; but he was not. He was truly thankful to God for all His goodness to him and he served Him just as faithfully day

and night as he had ever done, but I will tell you why Joseph was not perfectly happy; he was **homesick**.

If any of you boys or girls have ever been homesick, you will know just how he felt. Not all the fine houses, nor good things to eat, nor beautiful new clothes to wear, nor **anything** you may have can make you happy when you are homesick. Joseph was homesick—every day—and every day he asked God if he could not, please, see his dear old father before he died, and see his brothers and know that they were sorry for their dreadful treatment of him when he was a little boy.

Really, in spite of all they had done to him he loved them and wanted to forgive them.

Now, God was planning to answer this prayer of Joseph's.

One day one of his servants came in to him and said there was a large party of strangers, foreign looking fellows outside, who had come a long journey in order to buy corn, as they were suffering from the famine in their country too, and he inquired if he should sell to them. Joseph told him to bring the men in; and lo! and behold! when they came in they were his own brothers; every one of them there except his baby brother Benjamin.

Of course they did not recognize Joseph, because they never dreamed, even if he was alive, that he was the great Governor-general of Egypt. If they ever expected to see him at all it would be somewhere among the slave-gangs, working at some hard task; and even then they would hardly have recognized him, as he was a lad about seventeen when they sold him, and now he was a man of about forty.

But Joseph knew them; they had not changed much either in their faces or in their dress; and especially he understood their language, which was Hebrew, while in Egypt he spoke Arabic. He talked with them now through an interpreter, not because he could not understand or speak their language, but because he wanted to find out whether his brothers were sorry for what they had done to him.

He made up his mind when he saw them that he would thoroughly test

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them, and if he found they were repentant, then it would be time enough to tell them who he was.

So he played the part of a haughty ruler before them; was stern and exacting, accused them of being spies, and when they told him about their families and said that they were all brothers, and had a father and a younger brother at home, he pretended not to believe them, but said he would only sell them corn provided they left one of their number behind in prison as a guarantee that they were not spies and that their story was true. If they ever came back for more corn he said they must bring the younger brother with them.

You see Joseph was eager to see his younger brother Benjamin and he wanted to find out if his brothers treated Benjamin kindly and not as they had treated him, because, of course, he could not trust them until they proved that their wicked, evil hearts were changed.

So one of the brothers, named Simeon, was left behind in prison, and the rest started back with their corn to tell their old father all about their experiences, and how the Governor had not trusted them, and had kept Simeon behind as a hostage, and told them they need not come back for more corn unless they brought Benjamin with them. They were frightened by all this and they were more frightened than ever when they opened their sacks of corn at home, and found all the money which they had paid for it returned and lying in the top of each sack.

They knew something was wrong, but they could not tell just what. Their consciences began to trouble them and they remembered their treatment of their little brother Joseph so many years ago, and how he had cried for mercy then and they would not give it, but had sold him into a cruel life of slavery; and now they felt God was beginning to punish them for that old crime. The Governor did not believe them; one of their number was in prison; and now they would be considered thieves because their money was in their sacks; and they could never go back for more corn unless they took Benjamin with them. They knew their father would never part with Benjamin, because he believed Joseph had

lost his life while with them, and from that day to this he would never trust Benjamin out of his sight.

But when all the corn was eaten up and they had no longer any food for their children or their cattle, their father said unto them, "Go again, buy us a little food. And Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you."

This the old father Jacob flatly refused to do, until the oldest brother Judah said to him, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever."

Now, you see, how differently these brothers felt towards little Benjamin from the way they had felt and acted towards Joseph years before. They were truly sorry for this sin.

At last Jacob in order to keep them all from starving to death consented to Benjamin's going with them, and they all started back with the money they had found in their sacks as well as more money for more corn. When they arrived in Egypt this time, they immediately showed the money that had been placed in their sacks before, and said they did not understand how it got there; but here it was, and they had brought it all back, and more money with which to buy more corn, and they also brought their youngest brother with them, of whom they had told the Governor, when they were there the first time.

When Joseph saw all his brothers again and found that they were honest men now, bringing back the money and taking care of their little brother, he could hardly refrain from telling them who he was and how much he loved them. But he thought he ought to make doubly sure that their change of heart was real, so he decided he would test them just once more, and if they stood this last test then he would tell them who he was.

He made up his mind that he would first give a great feast for them

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and find out all about his old father for whom he was so homesick; then, he would sell them the corn and start them back home again; but he would in the meantime have a very valuable cup hidden in Benjamin's sack. After they had started away he would send his servants to overtake them, accusing them of having stolen his silver cup, and when it was discovered in Benjamin's sack he would have him arrested and brought back to him. In this way he would find out exactly how the brothers treated Benjamin.

If they left Benjamin to his fate and did not try to save him, then Joseph would know they were still hard hearted and cruel; but if they came back with Benjamin and tried to save him, or actually offered to take his place in prison, then Joseph would know that they were truly repentant, and he could tell them immediately who he was, and how freely he forgave them their old crime against himself.

He was terribly excited over it; so dreadfully afraid they would not prove themselves truly sorry. But it all worked out just as he had hoped.

He gave them a great feast and brought Simeon, whom you remember all this time had been in prison, and seated them around the table according to their ages. They marveled that this Egyptian Governor knew exactly how old each one was.

After the feast, he sold them the corn and started them off on their homeward journey, all happy that everything had turned out better than they had expected.

But they had not gone far before Joseph's servants overtook them and accused them of stealing the Governor's silver cup. "God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing:" they said. "Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again unto thee out of the land of Canaan: how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold? With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondsmen."

So they opened every man's sack, beginning with the oldest, and of

course did not find the cup until they came to Benjamin's sack, and sure enough there it was!

Now do you know what every brother did?

You see they **were** changed men. They were truly repentant and their actions proved it.

My! but their hearts were heavy, and they felt dreadfully all going back to the Governor with little Benjamin accused of being a thief.

And poor Benjamin, he wept and wept, and told them again and again that he had never touched the cup—how could it have gotten into his bag? "Some one must have played a mean trick on him," and "what would his dear father say?" The brothers comforted him as best they could. They every one declared that Benjamin was innocent; that he had never stolen the cup. They did not know how it got there but they did know that he had never put it there, and they every one would go to the Governor and tell him. They would even ask him to punish them and let Benjamin go free.

So they were all brought again before Joseph, where Benjamin was accused of the crime. And then a wonderful thing happened. Before Joseph could say anything Judah, the big brother, who promised the old father that he would give his life to save Benjamin and bring him back home again safely, stood out from the other brothers and told Joseph the whole story of their treatment of their other little brother of so many, many years ago.

He said he knew all this trouble had come upon them because they had been so wicked and cruel to that little fellow, but that since then they were changed men—truly sorry for what they had done. And now any one of them would lay down his life to save this little lad, and send him home safely to the old father, who would die of grief if anything happened to his favorite child, Benjamin.

You see they were not jealous any longer of their father's love for the littlest one, even if he had a better coat than theirs, but wanted to spare their old father any more sorrow.

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So Judah said: "Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren." When Joseph heard that, he just could not wait any longer, but as soon as he had sent the servants out of the room—big, strong man that he was, he broke down and wept, sobbing: "I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." Then he kissed them every one, and forgave them everything, and told them to hurry back home and bring his dear old father to him, with their families, and their flocks, and promised to take care of them from this time on.

Then the brothers bowed themselves down before Joseph and begged him to forgive them, and Joseph raised them up and told them again and again that he freely forgave them all their sin.

And this was the way that old dream of his came true.

So you see how God took care of Joseph even when everything seemed to go against him. And because he prayed to God and tried to do what was right wherever he was, God made him a great man, and gave him a wonderful work to do for Him, and even made him the means of saving those who had treated him so cruelly.

That was just like the Lord Jesus, was it not? Do you know there are many things in the story of Joseph that remind us of the Lord Jesus.

Joseph was loved best by his father. So Jesus is loved best by His Heavenly Father.

Joseph was hated by his brothers. So Jesus was and is hated by his brothers, the Jews.

Joseph was sent out into the fields with food and kind messages from the father to seek his brothers, who were lost. So Jesus was sent into

the world with food and kind messages from God, to seek and to save His brethren, who were lost.

When Joseph came to his brothers they tried to kill him, and did send him away into a far country. So when Jesus came to his brothers they tried to kill Him, and they have sent Him away to a far country, for the present.

Joseph showed himself to his brothers and freely forgave them all their cruel treatment of him. So Jesus will one day show Himself to His brothers, the Jews, and when they see Him they will be sorry for their treatment of Him and He will freely forgive them all their sins.

Joseph was like Jesus in many ways, and we must be like Him too, and love Him, and trust Him, and pray to Him and do what He wants us to do, no matter how hard it seems to us at the time or no matter how people treat us. And we must forgive people even when they are unkind to us, as Joseph did, and some day when we see Jesus we will be like Him, and then we will be glad that we loved Him, and served Him down here.



STORY NO. 3.

DAVID

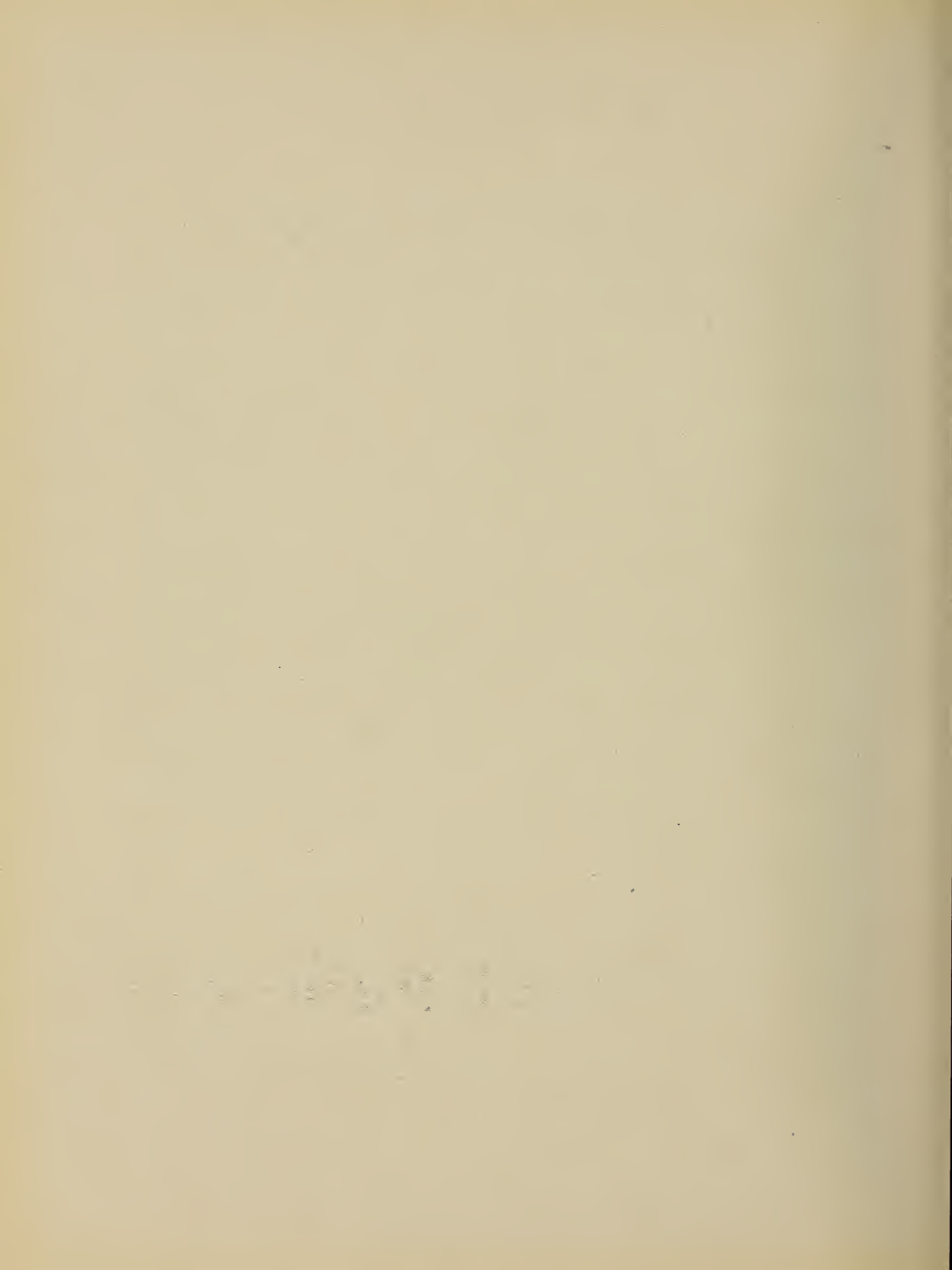
OR

THE GIANT KILLER.





SALT AND OLIVE



DAVID

OR

THE GIANT KILLER.



ONCE upon a time, in a little town at the foot of some mountains, way on the other side of the world, there lived a boy.

He was the youngest in the family, and had eight older brothers, who were not a bit like him, but were rough and cross and often very ugly to him, as I am sorry to say, sometimes older brothers are.

This boy's business was to tend his father's sheep, and every morning, at sunrise, he would get up and eat the breakfast his mother had cooked for him, and she would say a little prayer with him, and give him his lunch. What do you think it was packed in? They had no lunch boxes in those days, so it was tied up in a bag of skin, and this was fastened to his leather belt.

I must tell you how he was dressed. As it was a warm country he wore very few clothes. No hat, on his bushy, red hair, leather sandals on his bare feet, a loose coat made of cloth which his mother had woven for him, and in this coat a great big pocket right in the front. After a while I will tell you what he carried in that pocket, because he did not carry the things boys to-day carry in theirs—strings, and knives, and marbles, and candy. Those things, or as many as he had of them he carried in a little leather bag hung round his waist; but the big pocket in his coat was for something entirely different.

This coat was tied up short (only falling to his knees) by a strong

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leather strap, or belt, and on that he hung everything he needed for his day's work.

He needed many things too when he was off on the mountains tending his sheep all day alone, with no one to help him.

So he had tied to his belt beside his bag of lunch, another bag with some good strong leather strings in it, some perfectly splendid, round, smooth stones which he had found in the brook, and had rubbed and polished with sand and oil, until they were as smooth and as white as your best marbles. They were quite as good as agates.

Now all of these things have something to do with the story later; so you must remember what he carried.

Beside his polished stones he had little squares of leather of different sizes and thicknesses, and he had some very queer string, for it was made of cat-gut, which he had taken one night when the dog had killed the cat after a dreadful fight.

Next he had a splendid sharp knife. Every day he whetted and sharpened it on a hard stone near by. While the sheep were grazing, he would whittle all sorts of things, trying to make them more perfect, and always as he whittled he whistled a merry tune.

When I tell you that he also carried a bottle of oil hung to his belt you must not think of a glass milk bottle such as we have to-day, for this boy's bottle was a little horn, taken from one of the rams which had died. This bottle was filled with oil to be used for the sheep, if they were scratched, or torn, or bruised, while they were grazing.

Last of all, he carried in his hand a great long stick. It was curved, at the end, and he used it for many things beside a walking stick. He tested the ground before him to see if it was marshy or full of holes; he pulled the wool of the sheep loose with the crooked end of it, if they got caught in the brambles; he helped sheep over rough places by putting it under their stomachs and jerking them along. Sometimes to keep the sheep from running away where the wolves or the snakes could bite them, he had to hit them sharply with it, and thus keep them

very near to himself. He hated to do this, but he loved his sheep too much to let any of them get lost or hurt.

Then he had one odd thing for a shepherd boy to carry. One that his older brothers laughed at and teased him about; and he might have given it up if his mother had not told him to keep right on using it and not pay any attention to the brothers' teasing. She believed some day he would be a very great musician, and be able to do a great deal of good with his music. You see, he and his mother were great friends. Every morning she would pray to God, asking His help and guidance for her little shepherd boy that day, and every evening he would tell her all of his experiences and then they would thank God together for His care and protection, for this boy had some thrilling adventures. But to go back to this musical instrument which he carried, can you guess what it was? Well, it was not a piano, for they did not have them in those days and he could not have carried one if they had; and it was not a violin, though that is nearer to it; and it was not a horn, or a flute, or a drum. It was a harp, slung over his shoulder by a leather string, and one he had made himself, with the help of his mother, in the long winter evenings.

He had carved it from a curved branch of a tree one day, and then strung it with the cat-gut strings, and fastened them to little wooden pieces that screwed up and down. So he tightened the strings until they made notes under his fingers, and he could make regular tunes with them. After that, every day, he would take his little harp along with him and practise on it, making up songs and hymns as he played, all of them about God, and things that he had learned about God's love and care for him while he was tending his sheep.

But he carried more over his shoulder than just his harp; and this the older brothers did not laugh at, because it was the means of saving the whole flock one time, and if the flock had been lost these brothers would have lost all their food, and money, and clothing, for the winter.

Now this other thing was a sling. You boys have all made slings; and this sling was just like yours. It was made of a good, strong, forked stick,

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rubbed down very, very smooth with sand and oil. A square of good stout leather was loosely fastened to the stick with leather strings, and he practised with the stones from the brook, until he was so expert he could hit a white mark on a tree every time he tried.

You see how busy he was and how he trained himself to make use of every little thing until he became expert with it. So one day when his flock was attacked by a bear, this boy asked God to help him, and picking up a stone he swung his sling around his head and spun the stone right straight at the bear, so that it sank deep into his forehead killing him instantly. That was why the brothers never laughed at his sling. Another time, when a lion attacked the sheep, and caught a lamb in his wicked jaws, this boy rushed at him and caught him by his mane, and plunged his knife right into the lion's throat, and slew him before he had done more than torn the poor little lamb.

It was then that he opened his horn bottle and poured that warm, sweet oil into those wounds, and bound up the little lamb's bleeding side with the old linen his mother had given him for this very purpose. Now you will see what the big pocket in his loose coat was intended for; he put the little hurt lamb in it and carried it all the way home, and it was a very long walk and a heavy load for him, too. Oh, he was a splendid, big, brave, strong, kind, gentle shepherd boy, and he was all this because he loved God and talked to Him and asked Him to help him every day.

Now I want to tell you only two more things about this little shepherd boy David.

The first thing is about a very strange experience he had one day when he had gone out with his flock, as usual, and was busy practising on his harp and keeping a sharp eye out for lions and bears. This day he was pretty tired and sick of just tending sheep.

All of his brothers were talking about going to the war, and about their seeing their great handsome King Saul, and serving him, and doing great, and brave, and wonderful deeds for King and Country. Of course, David wanted to be able to do something as well as they, but when he

offered to go with them they jeered at him, and told him he was a baby and said he was only fit to run around with a flock of sheep, and that he had better mind his own business and be about it, too, or he would get into trouble. And, well, you all know the way some mean older brothers treat the younger ones. So David was sore at heart, and just as he was going down the street of the town, leading his flock, some of his school friends called after him and said, "Hie! Davie, "We are going to see the soldiers marching out to join the King. Come leave those old sheep of yours and take a day off. Come with us and we will have a fine time." Oh, he wanted to so dreadfully. He was awfully tired of sheep that day and he wanted to see the soldiers even if he could not go with them and be one himself. And for just one moment he nearly deserted his sheep. But he did not quite, and I will tell you why. Something inside of him made him think this:

"No; God has given me these sheep to care for. Mother said so, and she knows. Mother said if I cared for them the best I knew how, God was just as much pleased as if I fought in His army, and killed all His enemies, because He decides for each one of His children just where he can serve Him best.

These sheep are God's; and God has given me His sheep to feed today. So I will stay by them until He tells me to do something else."

Everything was very quiet, and still around him on that hot eastern summer day, when all of a sudden he heard some one calling his name, and looking up he saw a figure running towards him across the fields. When it came nearer he recognized one of his own brothers, and when he got nearer still the brother called "Hie, Davie, you are to go straight home. Father has sent for you. And it's none of your business what you are wanted for." You see, his brother was angry about something, for he had to stay and keep the sheep now, while David went home, and so he tried to make him think his father was angry with him and going to scold him.

Well, David hurried home, pretty anxious, and the first person he saw

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was his mother at the kitchen door, watching for him. She was all of a tremble, and flushed, and nervous, but happy, too; he could tell that. She hurried him to the well and made him draw water and wash the soil from his face, and hands, and feet, and then she brushed his bushy red hair herself until it shone, and blessed him there, as mothers do, and sent him into the room where his father was sitting waiting for him. When he came into the room he found the great High Priest of the nation sitting there with his father. David knew the High Priest because he had seen him several times when they had had the great feasts and sacrifices for the sins of their people, and he supposed he had come now to make a sacrifice and to have worship. What was his astonishment then when the great High Priest rose up, as he bowed himself before him, and laying his hand on his curly head said, "My son, God hath sent me here to tell thee that He has chosen thee to be King over His people Israel. And I am here to anoint thee for this purpose." Then he took the horn of oil from his girdle, and as the custom was and still is for the anointing of kings, he poured a few drops of the sacred oil on the boy's curly hair and prayed God to bless him, and train him for the great work entrusted to him.

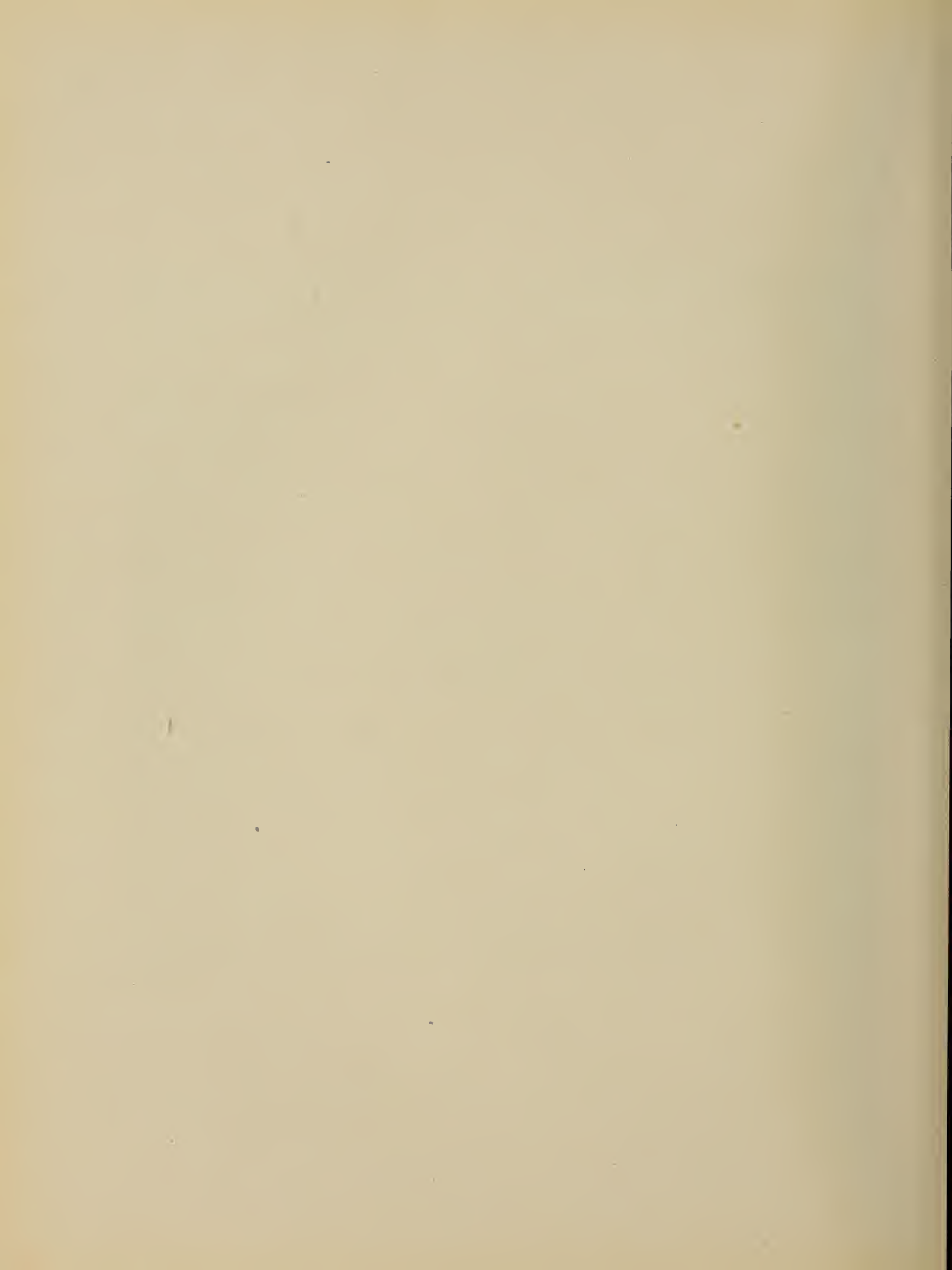
Do you not think that was a great ending to a day that was just like any other day in the boy's life? Just because he had listened to God and **been at his post** when God called him.

But being anointed King did not make David proud. He did not pay his brothers back for all their meanness to him. He did not get overbearing and make his parents and brothers wait on him. No indeed: he just went back to tending his sheep and taking orders from his father and his brothers, as he had done before, only he talked more than ever to God, and asked more earnestly every day for guidance.

He felt quite afraid he might not be the kind of a King God wanted him to be and he wished most of all to please Him.

Many years rolled around until—and now we come to the last thing I am going to tell you about—there was a great war in the land.





Just as a wicked nation with a wicked king at their head has tried so often to overthrow and defeat those who want to worship God, so in that day a wicked people with a wicked king at their head came against God's people, and all the men of Israel were ordered to join the army and go out to fight for religious freedom.

David's brothers all went, and David, as usual, was left at home. But he only talked to God about it, and his mother, of course, and she said: "God has His own plan and all we have to do is to wait for God to show us what he wants us to do, and then we can never go wrong." And sure enough; the very next day the father sent the boy with food and provisions to the army where the older brothers were encamped.

When David arrived he saw a wonderful sight. He had never seen a camp before, and this one was situated in a vast field with a wide stream dividing the two armies one from the other. The enemy was on the other side, camped all along the bank and on the hills, with banners flying and tents shining in the sunlight.

On this side as far as his eye could see was his country's camp. In the midst stood the King's tent with his standard flying from it, and grouped around were the tents of Israel's famous Generals. I wonder if he thought, "That is where I will one day be, in that tent, leading this people on to victory, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Perhaps he did; it would be natural. But if he did he never said anything about it and it did not make him proud, only humble and very angry at the enemy for daring to defy his God.

He loved God so much he could not bear to hear anyone say a word against Him. And so he was angrier than ever when having hunted up his brothers he heard what the enemy was really doing. They told him that every evening the biggest giant you ever saw, covered with heavy armour came out on the hill opposite. That he swaggered up and down, jeered at them and their God, saying, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." And every single man

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in that army, from the King down, was afraid of him and no one ever took up the challenge.

Then this boy **was** angry and he said to those standing around: "Who is this unbelieving Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

Now this kind of talk made the boy's brothers very angry, because they too were afraid of the giant, and they did not want their little brother to be bigger and braver than they. So the eldest brother scolded him roundly and said, "Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle."

But God knew what He was going to do, and so He had planned that other soldiers beside the brothers should overhear what David said. These soldiers admired the shepherd lad for his courage and they told King Saul about him, and the King sent for him and said, "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this unbelieving Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee."

Then the King, who was not a child of God and therefore could not get God's help, did a very foolish thing. He had his soldiers put his own helmet on David's curly head and his own armour on the boy's slender body and his shield in the one hand and his sword in the other. David swung the sword around a few times, and said unto the King, "I cannot

go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him."

Then he took up the tools he was familiar with, and with which he had so long practised, and as usual, he prayed God to guide him and tell him what to do.

So equipped he started out to meet the giant and the two armies ranged themselves on the sides of the hills to watch this unequal fight between an unarmed shepherd lad and a giant covered in brass from head to toe.

As David was running along to meet the giant Goliath he chose five smooth stones out of the brook, and got his sling out and prepared to do battle with his deadly enemy.

My! My but he was a big giant! 12 feet high, with 6 fingers and 6 toes, and covered with shining armour that glistened in the sun and made him a good target for all to see. His sword was twice as big as any other man's, and he marched up and down, bellowing like a bull, cursing and swearing and daring any one to come out against him.

When he saw the little unarmed lad running towards him as if to fight him, he grew perfectly furious and swore more than ever at him and called him all the evil names he could think of in his language, and said he would soon make mincemeat of **him** for the vultures to eat.

But David was not in the least frightened by him because he knew that his very wickedness made him weak, and he also knew that God intended to kill him and kill him by these very stones which he had just picked up out of the brook. So he called to the giant, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will

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give you into our hands." While he was calling all this to him, he fastened a stone in his sling, and swinging it round and round his head, suddenly let fly right at the forehead of the giant, for while he was bellowing at the lad he had pushed the front of his helmet up so that his face was exposed, and the stone sank deep into his forehead between the eyes and knocked him senseless to the ground.

The moment he fell David ran up on the big body—it was like climbing a slippery mountain; then he drawing the great sword out of its sheath, he cut off the giant's head and held it aloft for his country-men to see, and it took all of his strength and both of his hands to do it.

As soon as the enemy knew their giant was dead they took to their heels and ran, King Saul's army in hot pursuit.

So it was that God blessed the boy who loved and obeyed him, and made him a blessing to his whole nation.

A boy who did his daily task faithfully and so was given greater tasks to do. A boy, who, when he was treated unfairly never struck back but tried to help those who were weak and helpless. David, the Shepherd King of Israel, was a boy after God's own heart.

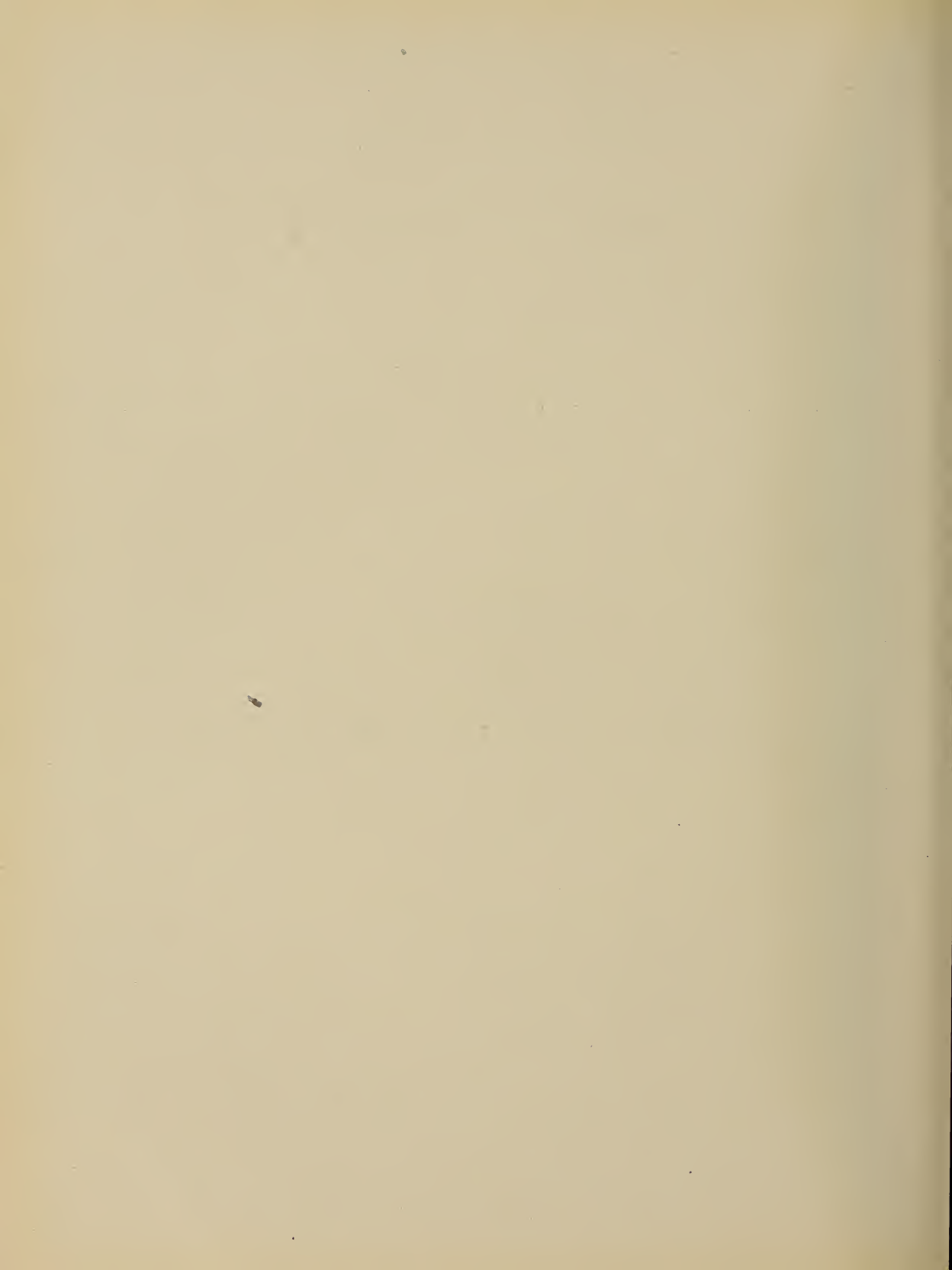
Will you not let God be your shepherd, too, and say every night with David, The Shepherd King, the Psalm he wrote for us; "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want?"

STORY NO. 4.

RUTH

OR

A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW'S DEVOTION.





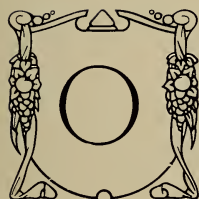
Ruth



RUTH

OR

A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW'S DEVOTION.



ONCE upon a time there lived a man and his wife, who had two sons. The country in which they lived was at first a very beautiful and a very prosperous one, but after a while the crops commenced to fail and there was a famine in the land, and a great many people moved away.



This man and his wife, with their two sons were among those who left the country in search of better times, and as so many people still do, they tried to find these better times in a heathen land, where God was not honored or obeyed, and in so doing, they brought worse trouble upon themselves.

I expect they forgot to pray about going. At any rate, off they went, and they lived in this heathen land a long time; long enough for the two boys to grow up and marry heathen wives. Then one trouble after another fell upon the old Mother's head and she wept bitter tears, and prayed God to forgive her for ever having gone away from His own country, for she had learned that a little with God is better than a great deal without Him.

First, her husband died and then her two sons, and she was left a widow with her two Daughters-in-law and not a cent with which to support them.

One day after she had prayed about it, she called her Daughters-in-law

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to her, and told them that she had made up her mind to go home. That she had heard that God had answered the prayers of her people and had sent them plentiful harvests. Since they were young and beautiful they could soon be married again, and have husbands to support them; but that she was old and poor, and much as she loved them she could do nothing more for them. So the time had come for them to part, she to go to her own people and they to theirs.

Oh, how they all wept: for they really loved their Mother-in-law better than they loved their own people, because she was gentle, and kind, and unselfish with them, as Christians are supposed to be, while their own people worshipped idols and were cross, and cruel, and selfish. So you see they did not want to go home, but insisted upon going with her wherever she went.

She was a wise old woman as well as a good one, and she knew that unless they counted the cost before they left everything to which they were accustomed, they might regret it some day, and then blame her.

So she argued with them, telling them how poor she was, and that she did not know how her people would receive her, now that she had lost her money, and her husband, and her sons. She painted the picture as black as she could, and frightened the older girl, who wept bitterly, and kissed her good by, and returned to her own people, and that is the last we ever hear of her in the story.

But Ruth the girl I am going to tell you about was a very different kind of a girl from Orpah. She knew it was better to be with her Mother-in-law, whose love she had tested, than to go back to her old life of worshipping idols. She loved Naomi, for that was the Mother-in-law's name, and the one she loved she wanted to be with, and she was not bothering about future husbands. What she wanted was to help this dear old woman who had been more than a mother to her.

The more Naomi painted a black picture the more Ruth saw she was needed to comfort her, so she said these wonderful words that have been the truest love words ever spoken;

“Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”

So Ruth left all and followed the one she loved.

When Naomi saw that Ruth's heart was set on staying with her, her own heart leaped for joy, and she prayed God to give this daughter a rich blessing for clinging to her in her time of need.

It was a very hot summer day when those two, the old Mother, gray, and shriveled, and bent, and the young girl, straight, and strong, and beautiful, set out together to walk from Moab, the heathen land, to Bethlehem, Naomi's little town in God's country. It was many a long weary mile, under that burning eastern sun, but these two were happy because they were together.

Naomi was excited about getting home; wondering which of the neighbors and relatives were still living: whether they would recognize her: what they would say. She whiled away the time by telling Ruth stories of her country, of God's care over them in the olden days, and of the customs and manners of her own people.

And Ruth was happy because she was with the person she loved best on earth, and could help her over the rough places and repay her a little for all the loving care she had bestowed upon her, ever since she had married into the family.

So as they walked, and talked, and the time passed rapidly until they saw the flat roofs, and waving tree tops, of the little town of Bethlehem, and knew they were near their journey's end.

Upon entering the village they went directly to the village well, where they sat on the broad stone rim to rest, waiting until the neighbors came out in the evening to draw water. It was not very long before the women gathered around, and were astonished to find the old, bent, gray-haired woman to be the Naomi they had all known in better days.

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She told them her sad history; how God had not prospered them because they had wandered away from Him; but how He had led her home again, though by bitter paths. She said her name ought to be changed from Naomi, which means "pleasant," to Mara, which means "bitter."

The women were all curious about Ruth because her clothes were quite different from theirs, and she wore her hair a new way; and she spoke their language with a slight accent; so they were a little shy of her at first, and not inclined to like her. They saw that she was very beautiful, and that made them a little jealous; but when Naomi told them how good she had been to her, and that she had left everything she was accustomed to, to come home and take care of her in her old age, and that she wanted to worship the only true God and become one of their own country-women, they saw that she was as truly good as she was beautiful. So finally they gave her a warm welcome and all promised to help her to secure work.

This was not very hard to do, because it was just then time for the harvesting of the barley, and the young people all turned out to work in the fields, and made of it a sort of holiday.

It was a custom, in that country that all the grain left on the ground, after the first had been gathered, was for the poor; so no one needed to starve.

So when Ruth went out to the harvest field she was allowed to follow the reapers and to gather of the standing grain. In the evening, she would beat out the grain she had gathered with a small, round paddle and take it home to her Mother-in-law, who would cook it; and thus they were able to eke out a scanty existence.

Every morning early Ruth would hurry off to the day's work, and it was hard, hot, dusty work. Sometimes she would nearly break in two with the ache in her back from stooping over so long; sometimes she would nearly faint from thirst, the dust from the reapers coming back over her and almost choking her.

When noon came she was glad to sit down with the other young girls,

who were either employed to glean, or, like herself, were poor and needy and gathering of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Ruth's crumbs came last of all and were the most meagre, because she was a foreigner and a heathen girl, and everyone gathered the grain ahead of her.

The special field in which Ruth gleaned belonged to a very rich man named Boaz who came often to encourage his workers, for he was an employer who looked after the comforts of his working people.

He, like Naomi, knew the Lord and served Him, for when he entered his field in the morning he always greeted his workmen with a kindly word. He used to say, as was the custom among God's people in those days, "The Lord be with you." And then all the reapers would look up from their work, and smile, and answer, "The Lord bless thee."

This day when he came into the field it was certainly a busy scene that met his eye. Everywhere as far as he could see waved the golden yellow grain under the sparkling sunlight. Long lines of figures moved rythmically through this golden harvest, laying it low in even rows with every swing of the long, sharp scythes. Behind this row of scythes came the young women tying the fallen grain into huge bundles and piling them high in pyramids for the later gathering into the great open barns.

Behind the reapers came the old men and old women picking up all that had fallen from the reapers' hands, and amongst these latter came the stranger, Ruth. She was noticeable not only for her great beauty but for her quiet dignity. She neither romped with the other girls nor tried to attract the attention of the young men. Steadily, quietly, she went about her work, often stopping to help some older person, less able to gather quickly, than herself.

It did not take the Master of the field long to spy her. The other girls were always trying to attract his attention, but he particularly noticed that this girl attended strictly to business and did not turn her head to see whether he noticed her or not.

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After he had watched her for a little while he called the Superintendent of the field to him and asked who she was.

He was told that she was the foreign Daughter-in-law of Naomi, who had just returned from Moab, and as she had asked permission to glean after the reapers, it had been granted her. So that she had been coming now for several days.

The more Boaz saw of her the more he liked her, and finally he made up his mind that he would find out if she was as good to talk to as she was to look at. So he crossed the field to where she was tying her grain together, and told her he was glad to see her gleaning in his field, and hoped she was finding enough there for her need, so that she would not be tempted to go to other fields, and added; "It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

In fact, as he looked into her lovely face, flushed as it was with her hard work, and the sun, and heard her sweet voice with its little foreign accent, and saw her honest eyes looking straight up into his own, he became more and more pleased with her. So he offered more and more inducements to keep her gleaning in his field, in order that she would not be tempted to go elsewhere.

At noon the employed reapers were all fed by the owner of the field and given their lunch under some near-by trees. To this meal Boaz invited Ruth, even taking the trouble to see for himself that she had a large supply of the food and drink.

Now, if Ruth had been like many girls all this kindness from the owner of the field might have spoiled her and made her self conscious and vain. But Ruth was a true woman, and tried simply to do her duty, and to be kind and helpful to everyone as she had opportunity.

After she had gone Boaz told them her story and ordered them to

make her work as easy and light for her as possible. He told them to treat her kindly, because she was the stranger in their midst, and had put her trust under the protecting wing of the God of Israel.

After that speech there were no more sneers or jeers, or insinuating remarks behind her back. One and all really did try to help her, the result being that she took home that night so much more grain than she had ever done before, that Naomi was astonished. And then had to hear the whole story before they went to bed.

Now as I said before, Naomi was a wise old woman as well as a good one, and she was very anxious to help her lovely Daughter-in-law to a new home, where she would be cared for and happy, and not have to work so hard, in the hot fields for a bare living for herself and her Mother-in-law.

In order to understand what I am going to tell you, you must know a little about the customs of this country, and how very differently they did things in those days from the way we would do them to-day.

In that land if a man died and left a widow, or land, or houses, the next oldest man in the family was required to redeem, as it was called, the widow, and land, and houses. That meant buy up all the dead man's property, and marry the widow, so that everything would be kept in the same family.

If the next oldest man could not do this because he was either too poor or had already married, he had to give up all claim to both property and widow in front of a number of witnesses. He did this by taking off his shoe and throwing it away from him, in proof that he threw away all his rights and claims to his relative's possessions. The next oldest man in the family could then step into his place and become the kinsman or redeemer, if he chose.

When you are older you will understand more about this.

Well, wise old Naomi looked up her family records and discovered that this rich landlord—Boaz—in whose fields Ruth had been gleaning, was, if not the very next kinsman, at least a very near one.

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Then she was shrewd enough to read between the lines of all that Ruth had told her of his kindness and courtesy, and she saw that Boaz was greatly attracted to Ruth, and really wanted to marry her, but did not think he could because she was a foreigner. The men who knew and obeyed God in those days were very particular about whom they married, and to marry a heathen woman was against God's commands, but Ruth had accepted Naomi's God as her God, so she could no longer be considered a heathen girl. If only therefore Boaz could be shown that it was his duty to marry her as her kinsman, Naomi knew that he would gladly do so.

She made a strange little plan. She knew it would never do to send Ruth to Boaz in the field, to tell him of this discovery of hers, as in that country it would make Ruth too conspicuous. So as Naomi saw Ruth could not do it by day, she determined to have her do it by night.

She told Ruth enough of her plan to make her willing to try it, and as Ruth had already seen that Boaz was superior to all the other young men of the place, she was the more ready to fall in with her Mother-in-law's plan to find her a home and a husband. And to her mind it was not amiss at all that he should be told that he could be kinsman to her if he so desired.

She promised to do as Naomi instructed her, which was, to put on her very prettiest clothes; to wrap herself in a long, dark veil, so that no one would recognize her, and when evening came to go down to the field where Boaz slept, and there to tell him who she was, and that he could be kinsman to her if he wished. She was to tell him also that in place of its being wrong for him to marry her it would be right, and therefore they would have God's blessing upon them.

Ruth said she would do just as her Mother-in-law told her. She put off her widow's mourning and dressed herself in soft blue garments, wrapping a large, dark veil about her head and shoulders, so that her dress was entirely covered and no one could see her face. Then she asked God to

direct her in what she should say, and what she should do, and to give her a home and a husband if it was His will.

It was the custom during these barley harvests for all the reapers to sleep in the open field, the women on one side and the men on the other, while the owner, or Master of the field, slept on the floor of the big open barn in the center.

This night, when the grain had all been piled on the barn floor and the supper had been served under the trees, and the men and women had gone off to their booths and resting places at the far corners of the field, Boaz wrapped himself in his long, dark cloak and threw himself down on some straw near the pile of yellow grain on the floor of his big barn. It was a long time before he could fall asleep, because he kept wondering why Ruth had not been gleaning in his field that day, and why she was not at the supper with the other maidens that evening. He was anxious for fear she was ill; or had gone to work in some other field; or perhaps one of his young men wished to marry her; and all these thoughts troubled him so that it was a long time before he fell asleep.

Ruth in the meantime had hidden herself behind some trees until she had seen all the reapers disperse to their different sleeping places. Then when she saw Boaz go alone to the barn floor she waited until she felt sure he must be asleep, when she slipped like a shadow through the deserted field and crept silently into the barn. She soon spied the dark figure of Boaz, wrapped in his long cloak, fast asleep at the bottom of a pile of the heaped-up grain.

She lay down quietly a little distance from him and waited until he should rouse and she could tell him her story.

After what seemed a long time Boaz awoke and immediately spied the silent figure lying in the shadow. He called softly "Who art thou?" Then Ruth arose and stood before him, bowing herself to the ground and humbly replying, "It is I; Ruth, thy maid-servant, and I have been sent with a message from my Mother-in-law, which as I could not deliver by day I have come to deliver by night. Thou knowest my story; that I am the

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widow of Naomi's son Mahlon, and have come to this country to be of thy people, to protect my Mother-in-law here and to serve thy God.

"And thou, according to the laws of thy country, and the customs of thy religion, art my legal protector and my near kinsman. I have come to ask whether thou wilt take this place and throw thy cloak around me as a sign that thou wilt do what God and thy law requires."

Boaz was astonished when he heard these words, and delighted, too. Here was an answer to his own desire and to his many prayers. But he knew what Ruth did not know, and that was that there was a man who stood nearer to Ruth's husband than he, and that unless that man gave up his right to Naomi's property and to Ruth herself, he could not legally marry her.

So he replied: "I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. If he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth."

Then Boaz measured six good measures of barley into the long blue scarf Ruth wore, so that she and Naomi would have plenty to eat that day without Ruth's coming back to the field to glean, and Ruth returned to Naomi. At the first streak of dawn, Boaz started off to the near-by town where the next of kin lived, to see what he could do about the matter.

When Ruth reached home Naomi was waiting at the door, all eagerness to know how her plan had succeeded, and when Ruth told her all that Boaz had said, and showed her the generous gift of barley which he had given, the wise old woman smiled and nodded her head and said, "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day."

But Ruth was not so sure as Naomi. She worried a great deal for fear the other kinsman would not be bought off and feared lest some stranger, whom she did not like at all, might come stepping in at the door and claim her for his bride. She loved Boaz and knew how good, and true

and kind he was, and many were the prayers which she sent up to God that day to give her to the one she loved best and not to some stranger.

In the meantime, Boaz was hastening to the town where he knew this other kinsman lived and was greatly troubled for fear his beautiful Ruth, who was now so nearly his own, might have to be given to another. He too was praying God that if it was His will he might be able honorably to win and redeem Ruth and make her his wife, for he loved her dearly.

When he reached the town he sat down on the stone bench beside the city gate, where all the prominent men of the city congregated for business and where the administration of legal affairs took place.

Boaz did not have very long to wait before he saw the man he was looking for coming towards him. He got up immediately and made himself known to him and told him he wanted to talk business with him. Then he called ten men who were idling around the gate to join them and act as witnesses in this legal matter. When the men were all seated, ready to listen, he told his kinsman Naomi's history, and first offered to him her land to redeem, or purchase.

The man jumped at the chance, and said he would be glad to buy it, and wanted to know the price.

But Boaz said, "That is not all. Naomi has also a Daughter-in-law, her son Mahlon's widow, and whoever buys the land, according to our laws, must marry the widow also. Art thou prepared to do this?"

How Boaz' heart thumped against his breast when he said that. Life or death hung for him upon the answer. If the man said yes, he would redeem both land and widow, then the light of Boaz' life would go out and he would have to give up his dream of having Ruth as his wife and the mother of his children.

He could not **see** for the tears which sprang to his eyes as he thought of all he might lose by a single word. And he could not **hear** for the roaring in his ears as the blood surged through his anxious brain.

The man had to speak several times before Boaz fully comprehended what he was saying.

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I do not know whether he was already married or whether he was in love with some other girl; or what the real reason was; but I do know that God intended Ruth for Boaz all the time, and as the nearest kinsman was not willing or able to marry her, Boaz now had the legal right to claim her, and to protect her, and to make her his wife.

He could have shouted for joy; and the blood flew back from his face to his heart so rapidly that it left him white as a sheet. But he only said to the ten men whom he had selected as witnesses, "Ye hear what the near kinsman says? He cannot redeem Naomi's field nor marry her Daughter-in-law; therefore I claim both by law, civil and religious, and I will be the redeemer." And they all said—the ten of them—"We are witnesses." Then according to the custom of those days, the near kinsman drew off his sandal and handed it to Boaz, and so the covenant was sealed between them and Boaz was acknowledged as the redeemer who had legally settled all claims.

My! how fast he went home, of course, right to Naomi's modest little house, where both women were eagerly waiting for the news.

Of course they could tell by the set of his shoulders and his quick, springing gait, and the bright, happy look on his face, long before he spoke to them, that all was well. And so Naomi and Ruth knew his news was good news before he could put it into words.

How happy they all were. And what a good supper Naomi put on the table; and how they all laughed and cried together, for it had been an anxious time, I can tell you. Many a little thing could have gone wrong if they had not been true to God and eager to please Him. But they had asked for His guidance and had done what was right, and now He had heard and answered their prayers; and there was not a happier household in the whole village of Bethlehem than this simple, honest one of Naomi, and Ruth, and Boaz.

So Ruth and Boaz were shortly married and lived happily ever after, and the poor little heathen girl, who had left all, and followed one she loved, was chosen by the great and good man of the village to be his

wife, and was made mistress of the very field in which she had one time so patiently gleaned.

Do you know, one day God sent a wonderful gift to Ruth and Boaz, and that was a dear little son, whom Naomi loved so deeply that she would not allow any one to nurse him but herself, and this little boy, whose name was Obed, lived to grow up and be a great and good man in Bethlehem, like his father Boaz. When he grew up and married he had a son whose name was Jesse, and Jesse grew up and had a son whose name was David. It was David, Ruth's great, great grandson, who became the good Shepherd King of Israel, the king we have read about and who wrote the twenty-third Psalm and killed the wicked Goliath; and from whom later came our own dear Lord Jesus.

So you see all God had in mind to give Ruth and Boaz when they asked His guidance and obeyed Him—even the sending by them into the world, the only Kinsman and Redeemer able to save us all, the Lord Jesus Christ.

STORY NO. 5.

SAMSON

OR

THE WEAK ATHLETE.



BERTOLDO DI GIOVANNI,
ITALIAN, XV CENTURY.
7443.

SAMSON
KILLING THE LION.

THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART

SAMSON

OR

THE WEAK ATHLETE.

ONCE upon a time there lived a man and his wife who had no son, and they wanted one very badly.



So they prayed and prayed and one day when the woman was working alone in her kitchen, weeping over her pots and her pans, because she had no son, suddenly she saw a great light shining in her kitchen door; and when she looked up to see what it might be, lo! and behold! an angel stood in the sunshine. The angel told her that God had heard her prayer, and was going to send her a little son.

But the angel said he would be a different child from any of the other boys in the village, because he was never to have his hair cut, nor to eat any pork, nor to drink any wine. As long as he did not do these things he would be the strongest man in the whole country. When the angel had given his message to the woman, he disappeared and she could hardly believe that she had even seen him.

When her husband came in from the field where he had been ploughing, she told him what she thought she had seen and heard, and the man could hardly believe it either. But they both prayed to God asking if it were true that the angel might be sent back again to tell them once more how to bring up the son he had told the woman would shortly be sent to them.

They waited and prayed, and one day, when the woman was out in the field, sitting under a shady tree, binding the sheaves her husband

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had reaped and laid beside her, again, she suddenly felt the bright light, all around her, just as she had felt it in her kitchen, and looking up from her work, lo! and behold! there stood the angel again, brighter than the sun which shone behind him.

Before he could speak, the woman sprang to her feet and ran to the corner of the field where her husband was working, and dragging him by his shirt sleeve, cried, "Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day."

So the man hurried back with her; and sure enough, there stood the angel, waiting to tell the man what he had already told the woman, which was that God would shortly send them a son; that when the boy came he must never drink any wine, or eat any pork, nor ever have a razor put to his hair. As long as he obeyed in these things God would make him the strongest man in the whole kingdom and one day he should be a Judge over His people Israel.

The man and the woman fell on their faces before the angel, for now they knew that it was all true and not a dream. They were so glad that they asked the angel to wait and let them kill a lamb for him, so that he could have supper with them. But the angel said, "Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the Lord."

This man and this woman loved God, and did as the angel commanded. They killed a little lamb and offered it to God in thanksgiving because He had promised them a son: and God was so pleased with their obedience that He accepted their gift by sending a flame of fire down from Heaven to burn it all up, for that was the way God proved to His people in those days that He forgave them and accepted their offerings. So when they saw the fire come down, and the little lamb go up in smoke to the sky, they knew God had forgiven them all their sins and was pleased to accept their gift.

Sure enough, by and by a baby boy came to the mother, and he was just the dearest baby you ever saw in your life. He was healthy, and

rosy, and strong. You see, he ate only good, clean, nourishing food and drank only sweet milk and pure water. Every day, from the time he was a baby his mother brushed his wonderful raven black hair at night and wound it in seven long curls over her finger. His father taught him how to run, and jump, and swim, and wrestle. Very soon he grew so big and so strong that his father could not wrestle with him any more, because the boy could just bowl him over with one turn of his wrist. There seemed no stones too big for the boy to lift, nor any horses too wild for him to break, nor any trees too strong for him to snap. All the boys in the village were afraid of him because he could whip any one of them with one hand tied behind his back.

In a way, this was not very good for the boy, because it made him proud and brutal. He could hurt people and animals too easily, and in place of his great strength making him very careful and tender, it made him rough and cruel and very, very selfish.

He was not a good boy in many ways, I am sorry to say. This wonderful strength which God had given him to use for God's service he used most of the time for his own mean and selfish purposes.

There was, however, one good thing about the boy, and that was his wonderful faith in God. His father and mother had told him about the angel's visit before he was born and what God had told them he must do, and the boy believed it all and prayed to God whenever he got into trouble. I am quite sure that before he was through with his life he was truly sorry for all the wrong he had ever done, and that he asked God to forgive him.

When we read about him we must always remember that he did not know as we do about the love of the Lord Jesus and how willing and how able He is to keep us from doing wrong; and while he did know something of God, it was in a dim and far-off way. Being so strong, he was always inclined to think he could take care of himself in place of asking God to take care of him, and that is where he made his greatest mistake.

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Then the boy had another very bad fault, which somehow or other his mother and father never seemed to really correct in him. I am inclined to think his parents were a little afraid of him, he was so strong even when he was a little boy. But they ought not to have been, and if they had asked God to give them strength to punish him and to make him obey them, they would have saved themselves, the boy, and other people a great deal of trouble and sorrow. However, the fault was there and it grew to be a great, big, ugly sin and before the boy was cured of it, God had to punish him very severely in order to get it out of him.

Well, this fault I have been talking so long about was—being too fond of the girls.

What do you think of that?

This great, big, strong boy was silly over the girls. That was his great weakness, and it brought him untold trouble.

When he was grown up, he saw a pretty girl in a neighboring town, and in spite of the fact that she was not a good girl, and God had forbidden then, as He does still, a Christian marrying any one who is not a Christian, this boy would have his own way and would marry this girl.

When his parents found that he was determined to marry her in spite of all they could do, they said, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the unbelieving Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well."

Because, they were afraid of the boy they consented to go to the village where the girl lived, to ask her parents if they would allow her in marriage for their son. They all started out together, walking along the roadside, but the boy was so eager to get there first, that he went very much faster than the old people, taking a short cut through a vineyard. While he was hurrying along, suddenly an immense lion sprang out from behind a grape vine, and would have killed him, but the boy, with his marvelous strength, caught the lion in his bare hands, and tore him literally in half and threw his dead carcass into the tangle of grape vines. He

never said a word about this to his parents or to anyone. I do not know whether he was getting a little more modest about his strength, or whether he wished to keep it secret, or what his reason was for not telling it.

When they reached the village the parents made all the arrangements for the boy's marriage, and said they would be back on a certain day for the wedding, because in those days, just as in ours, there were many things to be done before two young people could get married. The bride, as now, had to get her clothes ready, and the groom had to get the house ready. So it was some weeks before the boy started back to the village to celebrate his wedding day.

When they came to the vineyard, where the boy had killed the lion, he ran ahead of his parents to see if the dead lion still lay where he had thrown it, and sure enough, there it lay, and in it a great, big honey comb, filled with the sweetest of honey. The boy took a large piece of it in his hands and ate it, and it was the best honey he had ever eaten. He carried a piece to his father and his mother, but still he did not tell them where he had found it.

When they reached the village everything was bustle and stir, for every one was getting ready for the wedding. The boy invited all the young men, thirty of them, to a great feast.

While they were all making merry the boy suddenly said to his guests: "I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty shirts and thirty changes of garments: But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty shirts and thirty changes of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it."

"Very well," they said; "we agree. There is not a riddle you can give us, that some one out of the thirty of us can not guess, so tell the riddle and be prepared to give us each a shirt and a change of clothing."

The boy stood up at the head of the long, low table around which the thirty young men were reclining, (for they did not sit at a high table as we do, but lay on mats or low couches, leaning on one elbow and reaching

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with the other hand for the things on the table), and asked his riddle, and this is what it was:

"Out of the eater came forth meat; and out of the strong came forth sweetness."

And in all the seven days they could not find a single answer for it. They tried every way and asked every person, but no one had the least idea what the answer could possibly be.

They tried the boy's father and mother; but they did not know. They asked the girl the boy had married; and she did not know; and she became angry because the boy had not told her the answer to his riddle. Finally, when the sixth day came and the young men could not guess the answer, they were frightened and angry for fear they would have to give the boy thirty fine shirts and thirty beautiful changes of clothing, and they said to Samson's wife: "Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee? And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, and she told the riddle to the children of her people."

Of course the boy never dreamed of her telling his secret to these young men. You see, he would not believe that she was not a good girl, even when his father and his mother told him, so he thought she could be trusted. She did not believe in God and was a heathen girl, without principle or honor, and she did not really care for the boy, or she could not have betrayed his secret to his enemies.

When the boy found out what she had done he was angry and very, very much hurt, because the biggest hurt any one can have in this world is to love and trust someone, and then find that they have deceived you.

When the thirty young men said to Samson, "What is sweeter than

honey? and what is stronger than a lion?" he said to them, "If ye had not ploughed with my heifer ye had not found out my riddle:" which meant they had stolen the answer from him, through his wife, by cheating.

Samson now had to supply thirty fine shirts and thirty beautiful changes of clothing, and he had neither the shirts nor the clothing, nor the money with which to buy them. So what was he to do?

He had to keep his word, because he was in a way honorable. He prided himself on always doing what he said he would do, and he had said he would give the thirty shirts and the thirty changes of clothing if these young men guessed his riddle; and the fact that they had cheated did not excuse him from paying his debt.

He thought, if I have to get these shirts and these changes of clothing I will make war on a party of men who are enemies of my people, and I will kill them all and take their shirts and their changes of clothing and give them to these young men who have guessed my riddle. And that is just exactly what he did. In spite of all his wickedness God had not yet taken his great strength away from him, because he had never yet disobeyed in those three things of which I told you in the beginning. As God had commanded he drank no wine, ate no unclean food, and never cut his hair.

But after he had sent the shirts and the changes of clothing to the young men he was still so angry with his wife that it was a long, long time before he went back to see her.

However, after a long time he thought she might be sorry for what she had done, and when she saw him again might love and try to help him.

So he took a present with him—a nice young kid—which was a very expensive present for those days, and went back to the village to see her. But lo! and behold! when he got there he found that she had married one of those thirty young men who had cheated to get the answer to his riddle.

Then the boy **was** angry. He raged and threatened vengeance on his wife, and on her father, and on all those hateful people. He deter-

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mined to be revenged on their whole country. You see the boy had never been taught the awful sin of trying to punish people who had harmed him. He had never been taught that God had said "vengeance is mine; I will repay." He had never heard of the blessed Lord Jesus who said, "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you."

He was just a big, strong, spoiled boy, who had never learned to control his feelings, or his wishes, or his temper, and he lived at a time when people fought and struggled and tried to get the upper hand in any way they could. There comes a time when a person or even a whole nation can become so terribly evil that they are dangerous, just as a leper is dangerous, because their wickedness will infect every one who comes in contact with them. Then God in those days of which I am writing, told His people to go to war against them, and rid the world of them forever.

Of course, while He had commanded the boy to make war against these wicked people, He had never intended him to do it in the mean and cruel way in which he did.

First, the boy went out into the forest, and made hundreds of traps. These he baited with meat from a number of animals which he killed. Then he set the baited traps in the woods, and waited all night until he had caught three hundred foxes in his traps. He was so strong it was nothing for him to handle three hundred foxes, and he could hold a fox with one hand so that it could not bite him. When he had caught his foxes he cut one hundred and fifty firebrands. A firebrand is a piece of soft wood, or pitch-pine, which burns very easily and for a long time, and when he had cut his one hundred and fifty firebrands he took the foxes he had caught and tied their tails together, tail by tail, with one of his firebrands in between the tails and then set fire to the brands and let the three hundred foxes loose in his enemies' cornfields.

My, oh my, you ought to have seen those foxes run. They tore this way and that; in and out among the grape vines, up and down the village streets, through the tall stalks of ripening corn, tearing and scratching,

snarling and snapping, yapping and yelping, twisting first in one direction and then another, wheeling and leaping, setting everything on fire until the whole countryside was one immense sheet of flame.

Oh, it was worse than any fire you have ever seen, as these three hundred foxes went whirling through the country, writhing with pain and terror, and carrying death and destruction wherever they went.

Cornfields were swept with flames; hay ricks burned to the ground; olive trees and vineyards were utterly destroyed; and every house in the path of the foxes either partially or totally burned. In the morning the whole countryside was one black scene of dying embers and dying foxes. It was a horrible and cruel deed and it only made the boy's enemies more bitter and angry than ever. When they looked over all the destruction of their property and their harvests they knew there was but one person in the whole country able to do such a deed, and they swore vengeance on their side for what he had done to them. Their first piece of vengeance was to burn down the house, and everybody in it, in which his wife lived with her father and her new husband.

The next thing the boy's enemies tried to do was to capture and kill him.

They employed some neighboring men to surround Samson while he was resting on a rock one day, and to bind him with brand new ropes, the strongest they could find. Then they dragged him off the rock and handed him over to his enemies. He waited until they came to a near-by village, and then with his great strength he stretched his arms and broke those brand new ropes as if they had been string. Then he pitched into them right and left. The only thing he could find to fight with was the jaw bone of an ass lying near by. He picked that up and cracked one man's skull after another with it until he had piles of dead lying all around him. Heaps upon heaps, until there were at least a thousand men slain by this one jaw bone of an ass. Well, of course no one could stand up against such a fighter as this, and the rest of the men fled in terror down the mountain side.

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When Samson had time to get his breath after this terrific battle he found that he was dreadfully tired, and the sweat was pouring off his body, and his tongue was cleaving to the roof of his mouth with thirst, because killing a thousand men with the jaw bone of an ass was strenuous work, for even such a strong man as Samson. He looked right and left for water, but as he was on a dry mountain side there was not a spring, or a river, or a well, or a brook, or a drop of water to be seen.

Then Samson did what he always did when he was in real trouble and found he could not deliver himself by his great strength.

He cried to God to help him and asked him not to allow him to die there of thirst in the midst of his slain enemies.

When he opened his eyes he saw something glistening in the sunlight, and going nearer he found that it was clear, clean water in the hollow of the jaw bone which he had just used as a weapon. Then he knew that God had performed a miracle in answer to his prayer: and sent him this cooling drink in this strange way in order to save his life.

A miracle is something which man cannot do, but only God can do. We do not need to know **how** He does it, it is enough for us to know that He **can** do all His holy will.

How he sent the water into that hollow bone I do not know, but when I see God I expect He will tell me.

At any rate, the water **was** there and saved Samson's life, so that he could be Judge over his nation for a great many years to come. As I said, I wish Samson had grown better after this in place of worse. But Samson was very like the rest of us—crying to God in trouble, and then forgetting all about Him and doing his own way as soon as he got out of the trouble.

The next pretty face he saw made him completely forget God, and when he went into a town to follow that pretty face his enemies in the town surrounded the city and watched there to catch and to kill him as soon as he would appear at the big gate that led through the town wall into the highway.

But God had not forsaken Samson, and once more allowed him to use his great strength to escape from his enemies' hands. At midnight he walked down to the massive gates of the city Gaza and lifting them up upon his huge shoulders he carried the gates and door posts and framework all up to the top of a near-by hill. The men in the town, and all the horses, and all the mules were never able to get those gates and posts back again to their place in the city wall.

I wonder if all the stories of Hercules, that mythological giant of whom you will study by and by, are not built upon these stories of this wonderful giant, or rather, the wonderful strength of this poor, weak man?

The tale of Hercules is just a fairy tale, but the tale I am telling you is true, every single word of it, for God has told us about it in His Holy Book, which contains only true stories.

After Samson had walked away with those iron gates, the Philistines, almost despaired of ever conquering him, but his same old weakness for a pretty face got him into his next trouble. And this time it was fatal.

When the Philistines found that he was again visiting a heathen woman in their town and that he would do almost anything she asked him, they offered her a large sum of money if she would find out what was the secret of his great strength. As she was a wicked woman who loved money and would do anything to get it, and did not love Samson but cared only for the presents he brought her, she said she would try to find out.

So one day she invited Samson to visit her and his silly vanity was flattered at the invitation. He hurried up to her home with his presents and when he got there lo! and behold! she was in tears and said she knew he did not love her any more because he had never told her what made him so much stronger than anybody else in the world.

Now this big, strong man was like a good many other big, strong men, he could not stand the sight of a woman's tears. And that is as it should be, only, it is just as well for a man to find out first whether the tears are real, and whether the thing the woman is crying about is worth while.

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But Samson was so impetuous, and soft-hearted, and weak-willed that he never stopped to think of the consequences, but only of making her stop crying, so he told her he would tell her his secret. No one in the world knew the secret of his great strength but his father and his mother, and I doubt if they were still living; I do not believe they were. At any rate, Samson did not want to tell, for he did not quite trust this woman, and now he lied to her. He told her that if anyone was clever enough to tie his hands and feet with strong, young, green, willow branches his strength would leave him and he would be as weak as other men. Of course she thought what he told her was true. So the next time he came to visit her, while he was sound asleep, she tied him all around with strong, young willow branches. In the meantime she had hidden a company of her friends, behind a door in her house, and arranged with them that when she would call they should enter the room and carry Samson away, bound.

The plan did not work because you see, when she had Samson bound with the willow branches and called to him, "Samson, Samson, the Philistines be upon you," he jumped up out of his sound sleep, broke all the willow branches as if they had been string, and the men were afraid to touch him.

Of course this made the woman, whose name was Delilah, very angry indeed, because she saw that he had just been deceiving her and unless she found out his secret she could not get the pile of silver the men had promised.

So she wept and wept and said he never loved her at all, and he need never come to see her again if he would not truthfully tell her his secret, until finally Samson, to keep her quiet, and in order to visit her again, said he would tell her.

I hate to tell you, and I do not know why he thought she would not find out this time as she had done the first time that he was deceiving her, but he did deceive her a second time and told her another lie.

He said, "If I am bound with brand new ropes, ropes that have never been



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used on anyone else, then my great strength will leave me and I will be as weak as other men"

Delilah was sure now that she had the real secret, so she got brand new ropes, ropes that had never been used on any one before and hid them in her house, and sent for the men to come again and bring their silver with them, because this time she was sure she had found out the secret of Samson's great strength.

Samson seems to have been a great sleepy head, because he was always falling asleep, it seems to me, and I am sure part of his trouble was laziness which made him neglect his business and finally was his ruin.

As soon as Delilah had persuaded him to come to see her again, he went to sleep, as he had done the first time, and then she hurriedly bound him round and round with her yards and yards of brand new rope until he really looked like a mummy, all wrapped up in a winding sheet. She told the men to be ready to seize him as soon as they should hear her call, for **this** time she was sure she had Samson bound hand and foot. So she had, but not in the way she thought, for he was bound **not** by brand new ropes, but by his own weak, silly, wicked character.

This time, when she had finished tying him all up in a double bow knot, she clapped her hands and called: "Samson, Samson, the Philistines be upon you," and he wakened out of his sleep and sprang to his feet and snapped all those yards of brand new rope as if they had been thread, and she knew again she had been deceived and the Philistines were afraid to touch him.

At this rate Delilah knew she would never get the pile of silver which she so much coveted. The Philistines too were even becoming tired of being deceived by her; and so they said they would give her but one more chance. She made up her mind this time she **would** find out and not be deceived as she had been twice before.

She tried another method with Samson this time. Instead of weeping and upbraiding him she made herself just as beautiful as she could and

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gave him a dinner of everything to eat he liked best, and persuaded him to **really** tell her wherein his great strength lay.

Samson was so delighted by her flattery that he pretty nearly did tell her; but not quite. He still kept his secret but he told her that if she wove his wonderful long black locks in a web (that is, a kind of loom) and would pin the web down to a big beam with a wooden pin, that **then** he would be caught in a net, like a spider, and his great strength would go from him and he would be no stronger than other men of his size.

Samson was coming nearer the truth than he thought, because he was already caught by his silly heart in the spider's web, and the cruel spider was nearly ready to eat him alive.

No sooner had he told Delilah this than she waited until he fell asleep again, as she knew he soon would, and then she quietly wove his long black hair in and out of a loom which she had concealed in her house, and fastened the web to a great big beam in the floor with an enormous wooden pin. Then she told the men who were hidden in the house to wait until she should call them, for this time she had Samson caught in a web of his own making, out of which he could never escape.

When all was ready she clapped her hands softly and bent down near his head which was tied to the floor by his long black hair, and called until she awoke him. "Samson, Samson, the Philistines be upon you."

When he heard her soft voice he got awake gradually, and as his eye grew accustomed to the light he saw what she had done to him and he laughed out loud and lifted up his big, black, curly head and pulled the loom, and the wooden pin, and big beam right out of the floor, and they hung on his hair like giant hair-pins.

You can imagine what a funny sight he was, and how afraid those Philistines were to try and catch a man who could pull the floor up by the roots of his own hair. So they did not get him this third time.

I can not imagine why Samson kept going back to see this wicked woman when she tried again and again to wrest his secret from him and was so teasing and insistent; but he did.

People say love is blind. But I think Samson's love was deaf, dumb and blind. But his love was not real, true, good love at all, it was just silly weakness. And now I will tell you how this wicked woman did finally get his secret from him and deliver him over into the hands of his enemies.

When she found that he had deceived her three times she told him unless he would tell her the truth he need never come back to see her again. So rather than give her up he did a wicked thing, for God never intended him to reveal the secret of his great strength to anyone.

Like many another strong man, he grew tired of Delilah's constant nagging. You know the wise man says, "Constant dropping wears away a stone," and Samson's heart was far from being a stone. It was just a little piece of soft putty, or jelly, I think, and it could not resist this constant nagging, and weeping and threatening, and so he told her.

He confided to her all about the angel who had told his father and his mother about him and his great strength before he was born. How he had been born to be Judge for his people Israel and to fight against their enemies and God's enemies, the Philistines, and how this miraculous strength had been given him for this purpose alone. That it was a compact between God and himself that so long as he kept his vow not to drink wine or eat anything unclean, nor have his hair cut, so long his strength would remain. But that if his great, long, black, curly locks were cut off, then his communion with God would be cut off, and his great strength would go from him, and he would become as weak as any other man.

This time Delilah knew that he was telling her the real secret. She knew now that she had Samson in her power in a way she had never had before. She knew now that she had the power to separate him from God; and she did not hesitate to use it.

She called her Philistine friends together and told them she knew now that she had the secret; that there would be no failure this time; that all she required was a barber that when she called they should be ready

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to rush into the room and surround Samson, and she would guarantee he could make no resistance, but would be as putty in their hands.

So again she invited him to visit her; again he went to sleep; and while he was asleep the barber stepped softly into the room and quietly, without waking him, cut off his seven beautiful, long, black locks and laid them at Delilah's feet.

Then she called to him, "Samson, Samson, the Philistines be upon you." And he awoke as aforetime and leaped to his feet, expecting to feel his old strength in his arms and legs again, and to laugh at her efforts to hold him, but something strange had happened; he felt weak; he felt light-headed; he said, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself." But as he shook his great head there were no long locks of black hair to curl around his neck as they had always done. His head felt strange and light; and he looked about him in a dazed sort of a way; until his eyes then fell upon those locks lying on the floor at Delilah's feet.

Then he knew. He knew the person he had loved and trusted had betrayed him. He knew that he had sinned and brought this judgment upon himself. He knew he had sinned against God again and again, until God had allowed his own weakness to bring him to this bitter end.

"Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." Samson had sown self-indulgence. Now he was reaping separation from God. He knew that the strength of God had left him. His glory had departed because he had not valued it. He had sullied his trust.

He dropped his great head, shorn of its glory and strength, into his hands and wept like a little child. Too late he remembered what God had given him and what he had thrown away. Too late he remembered that he had betrayed his trust and that his office would now be given to another.

Oh, how it makes our hearts ache to think of all he might have been, and too late he realized it.

The Philistines rushed upon him then, all those evil men, his enemies;

shouting and taunting; now any old rope would bind him; any group of men could overpower him; any weapon could overcome him. Like a child they led him away, and like all cruel cowards, they used their power over him to humiliate, and degrade, and torture him.

They pulled him this way, and that; they struck him with their open fists, and pricked him with their swords; they spat upon him and kicked him, and finally they thrust red hot irons through his eyes and put them out forever.

In prison—dark, and dismal, and cold—tortured with the burning pain in his eyes; humiliated with his terrible plight, which he had brought upon himself, oh! how bitterly he repented of all his crimes. He learned in his pain, and darkness, to call again upon God who had borne so long with him. He learned that it was better to be in prison with God, even if blind, and sick, and weary, than in the tents or palaces of wickedness without God.

So blind Samson in the prison was a very different Samson from Samson sleeping in Delilah's house, and Samson saw more light in his blindness than he had ever seen with his sight. And Samson in his weakness found more strength than he had ever found when he was strongest.

How those cruel enemies made him work. Every day they had a little lad lead him bound in heavy brass chains, for they were still afraid of him, to a mill where the enormous stone wheels ground the corn for the Philistines, and there every day, for oh such long weary months, Samson turned those wheels and ground in the prison house of his enemies.

Night after night in his weariness and blindness and pain he prayed to his father's and his mother's God, and God heard and answered him and finally put him out of his misery.

This is how He did it. Ever since Samson had been caught and imprisoned the Philistines had been making feasts, and boasting that their great enemy, Samson, who had kept them all in terror for so many years, was now grinding their corn for them in the great stone prison house in Gaza, the very city from which he had carried the gates, you will remem-

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ber. One day they said at one of their great feasts, "Call for Samson, that he may make us sport."

So as a poor mouse is worried by a cruel cat, who half kills it and then lets it go, and as soon as the mouse thinks he can escape, pounces upon it again and gives it another bite and yet does not quite kill it, so these cruel men sent for Samson and led by a little lad he was brought in to them for their sport.

There he stood, a great giant of a man, the biggest man in the whole crowd, but blind, holding on to the shoulder of a little lad. And there, gathered on great galleries all around the big banqueting-hall, stood or leaned thousands of men and women, who jeered at him and mocked him and threw things at him, who asked him who struck him, and why he did not hit back, and what it felt like to be blind, and how it seemed to be weak?

He stood there silent, blind, immovable, bound in fetters of brass, while they heaped every manner of insult upon his poor bowed head.

They did not see his lips moving in prayer. But he did pray, and while his prayer seems a strange one to us, we must always remember that in the days I am telling you about, God punished evil people very often immediately for their wickedness.

He asked the little lad to lead him to the pillars that supported the great roof of the house, where all the men and women were gathered who had been taunting him; and the little lad did so.

Now there was one thing the wicked Philistines had forgotten and never noticed, and that was that **Samson's hair had grown long again.**

They did not know it, but this was an outward sign that God had given Samson his great strength back again, because of his repentance and his prayers.

So the little lad led Samson to a place in the great hall where his hands could feel the enormous columns that supported the whole building, and there, blind, scorned, betrayed, taunted by those around, he put up this, his last prayer.

"O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God, that I may be once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.

And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.

And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

It is a sad story; a sad life; and a sad ending.

It had such a bright beginning. It began as so many lives do, with God's good gifts, and because they were not appreciated, not used for God's work, but slighted, soiled, and used for selfish indulgence, the life went from bad to worse, until it went out in darkness and death.

STORY NO. 6.

ESTHER

OR

THE BRAVE GIRL QUEEN.



S. RICCI.

ESTHER BEFORE AHASUERUS.

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

ESTHER

OR

THE BRAVE GIRL QUEEN.



ONCE upon a time there lived a King, who was a very great King, but I am sorry to say he was not a very good one. He did not know or love God. One day he gave a great feast to all the Lords and Princes of his land to show them all his wonderful possessions. You will hardly believe it when I tell you that he kept up his feast 170 days. Just think of that. Over five months, eating and drinking and making merry. What a waste of time! At the end of the 170 days the King threw the palace doors open to everybody, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, big and little, and showed them all the beautiful things in his palace. And oh! it was a very wonderful palace, indeed. You and I have never seen anything like it.

The curtains of richest silk, greens, and whites, and blues, were tied to the marble pillars of the immense rooms, with purple linen cords drawn through silver rings, while the floors were paved like a checker board with marble, in squares of red and blue, and white and black.

The plates and goblets used at the banquet were of solid gold, each one of a different design. As the feast went on the King became more and more puffed up with wine and pride until he in his desire, to further astonish these visiting Lords and Princes sent a Royal Messenger commanding his Queen to present herself in the banqueting hall that all might admire her beauty.

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But the Queen was very busy giving a banquet of her own, in her palace, to the wives of the visiting Lords and Princes, and besides, in that country it was a great disgrace for a woman to appear in public before strange men. There women always wore veils over their faces except in the presence of their own fathers or brothers or husbands. So this Queen, who was not afraid of the great King and knew he had no right to ask her to show herself in public before strangers, sent word back that she would not come, and that made the King terribly angry.

He was all tired out anyway with this eating and drinking and entertaining; so when the Queen refused to obey him, he flew into a rage like a naughty little boy.

He called all the Lords and Princes around him and they had a great consultation deciding what to do about it. "Because," said they, "if the Queen sets the example of disobeying the King's command all the wives in the kingdom will think they can disobey their husbands." This upset the other Lords and Princes so much that they urged the King to punish her, so that all the other wives would be afraid ever to disobey their husbands. As the King was already angry enough to do almost anything, he wrote out a decree that this disobedient Queen was to be banished to a distant castle.

Perhaps she was glad to go. I do not know. But at any rate, she was sent away. The King sent Messengers all over the country to tell everyone how wicked his Queen had been to disobey him, and how he had banished her, and said every Lord and Prince would do the same with his wife if she, like the Queen, disobeyed. Of course, this frightened all the wives everywhere and made them very obedient to their husbands for a long time to come.

But after a while the King felt lonely, and the Lords and Princes were afraid he might send for the naughty Queen to come back again. If he did that, they knew that their wives would refuse to do what they told them, and make trouble for them at home. So they put their wits to work to prevent it. They hit upon a splendid scheme, which they told to

the King, and he was so pleased with it that he at once ordered the Royal Messengers to carry his new decree all over the kingdom.

Now the scheme was this. On a certain day everyone in the country who had a beautiful Daughter, or Sister, or Cousin, or Aunt, whom he thought might make a good and dutiful wife for the King, should bring her to the palace, and these beautiful maidens should then be kept there for a whole year to be made even more beautiful, if that were possible. Then, when they were all ready, on another certain day, the beautiful maidens should be brought before the King, and he could choose the one he liked best, and crown her Queen in place of the disobedient Queen who was now far away, banished in a distant castle.

He sent the Royal Messengers all over his kingdom, to summon the beautiful young maidens to the palace, on a certain day, and let him see who among them should be his Queen. What a stir it made in every town where this proclamation was read.

In those days, all proclamations had to be sent by Royal Messengers on horse or muleback. These rode as far as they could, delivering the message to the next Messenger, who was waiting to receive it, until the message had reached every town and province in the kingdom. It was then posted in the market place for all to read.

Oh, dear, every girl in the kingdom hoped she might be chosen Queen, and everyone coaxed her Father, or her Brother, or her Uncle to take her up to the palace, on the appointed day. They did not have glass mirrors in those days, but every girl looked in her mirror of shiny steel, and crimped her hair, and put on her prettiest clothes, and thought she was surely the most beautiful girl in the whole kingdom.

Now, as the King could choose but one to be Queen, you can imagine how many disappointed maidens there would be after the choice was made.

God, however, was watching His own people and those who loved and trusted Him, and was working out His own plan in spite of the evil King and his wickedness.

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There was in the kingdom a very good, and wise, and clever man whose name was Mordecai. He was a Jew, and prayed to God about everything, and when he read this proclamation he talked to God about it, because he had a young and beautiful orphan cousin, who had been left in his care, and she was as good as she was beautiful. If she should be chosen Queen he felt God might use her to help His poor people, the Jews, for they were treated as badly then as they are today in Russia.

He took Esther up to the palace on the great day, and told her to remember all he had taught her of trust and obedience to God, and Esther promised to do just as she had done when a little girl, obey her cousin and ask God to guide her in everything.

It was a wonderful sight when all of the maidens arrived in front of the King's palace in charge of their Fathers, and Brothers, and Uncles, and Cousins.

Some came on horseback and some on muleback and some in litters (these were mats hung between poles carried by big African slaves) and some came in chariots, and some on foot, because you see anybody could apply.

This whole mob pushed, and shoved, and screamed, and shouted, each man trying to get his candidate in ahead of the other, because they were all selfish about it and did not care who was hurt in the crowd as long as they got in first.

Of course the maidens were all tightly veiled, so nobody saw them, but they had little holes in their veils out of which they could peep and watch what was going on. They tried their best to see what the other maidens looked like, and whether they were more beautiful than they. But they could not see anything at this time but veils with little holes in them, like their own.

When the noise, and the dust, and the confusion, in the courtyard became so great that the King was nearly deafened by it, and almost wished he had never consented to the plan of the Lords and Princes, he ordered

the Grand Vizier to take the maidens into the palace, and command all the other people to return immediately to their homes.

In this way, they soon cleared the courtyard and locked the big palace gates so that no one else could get in, and when some belated travelers arrived they found the courtyard empty and all chance of their being accepted gone.

How those belated maidens wept, and wailed, and upbraided their Fathers, and Brothers, and Uncles, for starting too late, and they all exclaimed in chorus, "We told you so!" but they had to turn away and journey home again, because Kings will not wait for anybody, and if you want to do business with them, you have to be on time.

Now, we will look inside the palace and see what was going on there. When the Grand Vizier raised the veils of the many maidens who had been brought as candidates for the position of Queen, he saw at once that the maiden Esther was by far the most beautiful, and as he was quite sure the King would think so too, he took special pains to be kind to her and give her everything she could wish, in order to make her even more beautiful, when the time should come that she was to be presented to the King. You will all be interested in hearing of the many strange things these maidens had to do before they were considered fit for this high honor.

My, oh my, it makes one stop and think that if all this preparation was necessary for a person to appear before an earthly king, how very, very careful we ought to be when we appear before our Heavenly King. God wants all of His children to be truly beautiful, and He Himself tells us what He considers beauty. He says it is not brodered hair, or blazing jewels, or rich clothing, but it is a gentle, obedient, loving spirit.

It took a whole year to prepare Esther and the other maidens to appear before the King.

First of all, their own clothes were taken away from them, because they were not nearly fine enough, and new ones, a gift from the King, were brought to them.

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Then they all had to be washed in perfumed waters, and for six long months they had to take oil of myrrh baths every day. I do not know just what oil of myrrh was, but I suspect it was something like cocoanut butter, and made their skins nice and plump and white. Then another six long months they were given perfumed baths of many kinds, until finally the great day arrived, when the Grand Vizier pronounced them ready to be presented to the King. On this day there was great confusion in the palace and much unhappiness. One maiden refused to wear a blue robe because it was not becoming; and another would not wear a pink, for the same reason; and this one was ready to weep, only she did not dare for fear it would make her eyes red and spoil her beauty; and another stamped her foot with rage when the Hairdresser accidentally pulled her hair a little when she was combing it out. Really, the Grand Vizier was almost distracted by them all, trying to keep order, and to get them dressed in time for the King's inspection.

Esther was the only one who did not give him any trouble or did not lose her temper with the Head Hairdresser. But as I said before, Esther was a beautiful character as well as a beautiful maiden, and Esther was kind to those about her and thought a good deal more of other people's comfort than she did of her own. She really felt sorry for the poor Grand Vizier, and all the Hairdressers, when everybody made so much trouble for them; and she was not half as anxious to have the King choose her as she was to make things a little easier for those who were having such a hard time of it that day.

Esther was the only one who had prayed to God about it that morning, and she knew God would make the King prefer her, if it was His will.

After Esther had prayed about it she did not trouble herself any more, but helped this maiden change from a blue to a pink robe; and that one from a pink to a blue one; and really she seemed more interested in getting them to look beautiful for the King than in being beautiful herself. And while she did not know it, this made her more beautiful, for she looked so sweet, and kind, and happy, and sympathetic, that the

Grand Vizier confided to the Head Hairdresser that if he were King it would not take him two minutes to decide among all these squabbling, chattering, selfish maidens which one he would make Queen, for, said he, "I never saw such a pack in my life, and they would certainly lead any man a dance if they did marry him; but this Esther is worth all the rest of them put together." And the Head Hairdresser shook her head until her own hair nearly fell off, and said, "You are quite right. I agree with you. You know a good girl when you see one."

I think Esther wore lovely white satin, with long ropes of pearls, and her jet black hair braided in wide braids and coiled around her head like a crown. She was tall, and graceful, and modest, and her eyes were like dark purple violets, with a kindly look in them; her skin white like a lily; and her cheeks red like a rose. You see, she never put on any paint or powder so she looked what she really was—a lovely, dignified young girl, just as God had made her.

Well, it did not take the King, who had very sharp eyes, two minutes to see that she was by far the most beautiful of any of the maidens, and he got right up off his throne and took the golden crown off his own head and placed it upon Esther's and had her proclaimed Queen at once all over his kingdom.

Mordecai, Esther's Cousin, had been waiting all this time outside the palace gate to hear who was chosen Queen, and while he was there, he overheard two men plotting against the King's life.

After Esther was made Queen he revealed this plot to her and she told the King; and so the King's life was saved. The court Secretary wrote the whole story down in the King's diary and then the book was laid away in the royal library and entirely forgotten.

While Esther was living in the palace as Queen, and her Cousin Mordecai was watching at the palace gate, in order to take care of her and of the King, there was a very vain man at court who was a favorite with the King, and he persuaded the King to issue a decree that everyone about the palace should bow down to him as to a god, when he passed by.

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Esther's Cousin Mordecai was a devout Jew, who worshipped only the living and true God, and of course **he** would not bow down to this haughty Prince Haman when he went in and out of the palace gate.

This made Prince Haman furious, and when he found out that the man who refused to bow down before him was a Jew, he determined that in order to punish him he would have all the Jews in the country killed.

He went to the King and told him a very wicked lie about the Jews in his kingdom. He said they were rebels, and traitors, and plotting against his life, and he persuaded the King to write a decree, and to send it by the Royal Messengers all over the country, telling the people in the villages, and towns to massacre every Jew there upon a certain day, and thus the kingdom would be rid of all traitors and the King's life safe.

Nothing made the King so angry as to be told that anybody rebelled against him or wanted to kill him, so immediately he fell into the trap which the wicked Prince Haman had laid for him, and the Royal Messengers were sent post haste all over the kingdom with this wicked, wicked proclamation.

You see, he never knew that his beautiful Queen Esther was a Jewess, so he did not know that he was ordering her death as well, but he was, because the proclamation said every Jew. But God was taking care of Esther and her people, because they were His people, too.

Queen Esther's Cousin Mordecai, waiting outside the palace gate, was one of the first to hear of this wicked decree. He immediately took off his rich apparel and put on old sacking which with the Jews was a sign of the deepest mourning. Then he ordered a large pile of ashes hauled to the gate of the palace and having made a mound of it seated himself upon it, pulling his hair over his face and sprinkling ashes all over his head and shoulders.

You see, in that country, when any Jew was in trouble he showed it to all who passed by, by sitting, as they said, in "sackcloth and ashes." This custom meant they were so sad and so distressed that they could

not enjoy anything, and they hoped God would see their sorrow and answer their prayer.

Of course Queen Esther was very soon told about her Cousin Mordecai sitting at the palace gate in sackcloth and ashes, and she knew something dreadful must have happened to have made him lay aside the beautiful apparel she had sent him, and put on this horrible sign of mourning. So she sent a Royal Messenger at once to ask him what his trouble was.

Being Queen had not spoiled her a bit. The Grand Vizier and the Head Hairdresser were right when they had said she thought more of others than of herself, and really that is what made her fit to be a Queen. So when she knew her Cousin Mordecai was in trouble she could not rest until she found out the cause and tried to cure it.

He sent word back to her explaining the wicked proclamation which Prince Haman had caused the King, her husband, to write, and asked her to go to the King and request him to withdraw this fearful decree. She replied, that he probably did not understand court etiquette (that means the rules of the court) if he thought she could go in to the King uninvited and make a request of him, for it might cost her, her life.

The King was very proud and haughty, and never allowed any person, not even his own wife, to enter his presence uninvited.

So Queen Esther wrote back to her Cousin Mordecai that he had asked her to do an impossible thing, because the King had been so busy he had not sent for her for thirty days, and if she went to the throne room and asked to speak to him, and he was not in the mood to see her, he might order her head to come off and in that case what would become of her people, the Jews?

To this her Cousin Mordecai returned answer that she would certainly have to take that risk, or her whole nation would perish. That she would have to fast, and pray, and ask God to guide her, but she, the young Jewish Girl Queen, was the only person in the whole wide world who could save her people, and he added, "Who knows whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

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Now Queen Esther was a brave girl as well as a beautiful and unselfish one, and she saw at once that what her Cousin Mordecai said was true. There was no other living person to plead for her people. God had placed her upon this throne and had laid upon her young shoulders the burden of this task. She could do but one thing—ask God's guidance and take the risk. So she sent word back again to her Cousin Mordecai that she and all of her attendants would give themselves up to fasting and prayer and he and all of the Jewish people should do the same. Then she would take her life in her hands and go in unto the King, which was not according to law, and she bravely added, "If I perish, I perish."

Three days they all spent in fasting and prayer.

After these three days Queen Esther arrayed herself in her most royal apparel and made herself look her very loveliest. Never had she cared so much to look beautiful in the eyes of the King; and this time it was all for the sake of others, not for herself. So she put on the royal crown and all the royal jewels, and she was truly a wonderful sight as she stood in the King's reception room, waiting the word of command to come in to the King's presence. She knew that she might be stepping past that blue silken curtain to her death; for there was a custom in that country that if anyone approached the King's throne without his permission, the golden sceptre must be held out if they were to be permitted to live. If the golden sceptre was not held out they were taken away to be put to death.

So you see it was a very brave Girl Queen who stood in the outer room, not knowing but that the next moment might be her last.

How her heart beat under all those royal robes; and how her head throbbed under that golden crown; and then as the silken curtain was drawn aside, and her name announced by the King's Heralds, how her knees trembled as she started down the long hall towards the King's throne.

She could not **see** anything, her eyes were so filled with tears; and she could not **say** anything, she had such a big lump in her throat; and she could not **walk** far, she was so weak with fasting and fear. But God was with her. While her lips were moving in prayer and she hesitated a

moment waiting for strength to go forward, the sun suddenly shone through the window at her side and lighted up all the gems on her crown and glistened down her royal robes, making her look like a veritable Sun Goddess herself. Just at that moment the King spied her, and he thought he had never seen such a beautiful sight in his life, and wondered why he had ever allowed business to keep him away from his dear Queen so long. He stretched out the golden sceptre as far as he could reach and bade her welcome. And when Queen Esther heard his voice speaking kindly to her, the lump in her throat disappeared as by magic, and her knees grew strong and steady, and she whisked the tears away from her eyes so that she could see the golden sceptre held out to her. She knew God had heard and answered her prayer, so she was not afraid a moment longer, but went swiftly up to the throne and was quite able to answer the King when he said unto her, "What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request?"

Queen Esther was a very wise, as well as a brave woman. She knew that men became more interested in things if they are made a little curious about them. Also that men love a good meal and are far more likely to grant a request after dinner than before.

So while Esther knew God was helping her all the time, she asked Him to make her wise and careful in her dealing with the King.

The King was so delighted with the beauty of the Queen that he told her he would grant her her request even to the half of his kingdom. But this wise Girl Queen answered, "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him." The King was delighted and said of course they would come. Then Esther went back to the palace to get everything in readiness for the evening feast.

While Esther was preparing the banquet for the King, he was puzzling his brain over what the Queen could possibly desire of him, because he knew that the banquet was only a step toward her real request.

Queen Esther in the meantime saw that everything the King enjoyed best was prepared to his taste, and when he and the proud Prince Haman

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appeared in the evening, the King was so delighted that again he asked what was her request and promised it to her even to the half of his kingdom.

But Queen Esther was not yet ready to make her request; so she invited them both back the next night to another banquet. Again they both consented to come and Prince Haman went home so filled with pride at being invited by the Queen to her second banquet, that his wife could not do a single thing to please him.

But even the Queen's invitation could not make Prince Haman forget that Mordecai the Jew refused to bow down to him when he went in and out of the palace gate, and he made such a fuss about it at home that finally his wife, to keep him quiet, said: "Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman: and he caused the gallows to be made.

The night following the banquet, the King could not sleep. I do not know whether he had eaten too much, or whether he was so curious to know what the Queen's request would be, or what the trouble was, but I do know that God used his sleeplessness to bring about the answer to Queen Esther's prayer.

When the King could not sleep, he commanded the Court Secretary to read to him, and the Court Secretary went to the library and happened to select the King's Diary. Now, God directed the Court Secretary to read of the plot against the King's life, which Queen Esther's Cousin Mordecai had reported.

The King immediately asked what had been done to honor the man who had saved his life. The Court Secretary replied that nothing had been done for him. The King said that would never do; because kings always rewarded those who served them faithfully and slew those who rebelled against them.

In order to suitably reward the man who had saved his life the King

thought he ought to consult with some one, and asked if there were any of his court advisers in the palace, and was told that Prince Haman was in the waiting room. Prince Haman was just the right man to consult, the King thought; so he sent for him and asked him the question "what shall be done unto the man whom the King delighteth to honor?"

Of course, Prince Haman thought he was the man whom the King delighted to honor, and immediately thought of all the things that would most tickle his silly vanity; and he suggested the most ridiculous things you ever heard of.

He replied, "Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

It was a silly sort of a performance, was it not? And you can imagine how Prince Haman felt when he thought the King was going to say, "Thou art the man the King delighteth to honor." For then he would have this grand parade all to himself, throughout the entire city, and all the people would bow down to him more than ever.

So he could not believe his ears when the king said: "Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate; let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken."

Prince Haman nearly exploded with rage, but he did not dare say a word in reply to the King for fear of losing his own life; so he had to do as he was commanded.

When he got home his wife thought he was going to have a stroke of apoplexy, he was in such a rage and the only way she could manage him was to tell him to hurry up the carpenters who were making the gallows in order to immediately hang the Jew, who had angered him by refusing

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to bow down to him. While they were talking a Messenger came to remind Prince Haman that he was due at the Queen's banquet that evening. He had been so angry and so busy planning to get rid of his enemy, that he had almost forgotten about the invitation, but Queen Esther had not forgotten.

This night she had even a better banquet than before, and again the King, who was getting very curious to know what her request really was, promised her anything she asked, even to the half of his kingdom, and then Esther told him all.

She told him how some wicked man had plotted against the life of her people the Jews, and had persuaded him to sign a wicked decree that they should all be massacred on a certain day; and that if it had been anything less than death she would not have troubled the King about it; but she was there to plead for her own life as well as the life of all those dear to her.

The King could not bear her tears. His beautiful Queen Esther, who had always been so loving and gentle and obedient—in tears and pleading with him to grant her request. “Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?” and Esther pointed to Prince Haman.

The King was so angry he could not speak a word, but strode out into the garden for a moment before deciding what to do. When he stepped back into the room he found Prince Haman kneeling on the Queen's couch, clinging to her robe, begging her to spare his life. The King was angrier than ever, because in that country no subject ever dared touch the Queen, no, not so much as even the hem of her garment.

The King then shouted for the guard and gave command that Prince Haman should be executed immediately, and one of the guards who knew of the scaffold erected for Mordecai told the King of it, and the King said, “Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.” As some people express it, “he fell into the pit he had dug for another.”

But what about the poor Jews who were all to be massacred on a certain day throughout the kingdom? For when a King in those days made a decree and sent it all over the country by Royal Messengers it could never be recalled. The King was now in quite a quandary as to what he could do, for he had made up his mind to spare the Queen's people in some way; and where a King has will he generally has a way.

The first thing he did was to send for that wise and good and clever man, the Queen's Cousin Mordecai. To him he gave his signet ring with which to stamp all the official documents, the ring which Prince Haman had worn, and he told him to write a second decree, telling all the Jews everywhere that they might have swords and fight for their lives if anybody attacked them on the day of the massacre; and this was written in every language and sent post haste throughout the entire kingdom.

You never saw mules and camels and dromedaries and horses fly so fast in your life as those animals did as they raced over the country with this last decree from the King, so that they might be in time to save the Jews throughout the kingdom.

So Queen Esther was given all that she requested, and more, too, for her Cousin Mordecai was made Prime Minister and the Jews throughout all the land were permitted to fight for their lives two whole days in the month of March. Thus they defeated their enemies and made a great feast and holiday afterwards because they had been so wonderfully saved by the bravery of their unselfish Girl Queen—Esther, the Jewish maiden.

To this day the Jews celebrate this deliverance of theirs from the hand of their enemies, and call it the Feast of Purim, because Pur means lot, and the casting of the lot by Prince Haman to destroy them was defeated by God through His faithful servants, Queen Esther and her Cousin Mordecai.

So God watches behind the shadow of our lives and protects and shields those who trust and obey Him.

STORY NO. 7.

DANIEL

OR

THE BOY WHO DARED.

THE STAFF OF THE KING OF SICILY



DANIEL

OR


THE BOY WHO DARED.

CHAPTER I.

A BOY'S BOARDING SCHOOL.



ONCE upon a time there was a strong, beautiful Prince who was taken captive with three of his young playmates, and carried away to a far country. There in the court of the victorious King, these young Princes were taught all the knowledge which the wise men of the kingdom knew, and were trained to serve this great and powerful Emperor.

An illustration of three young boys standing side-by-side, wearing hats and coats. They are positioned to the left of the text block.

When the four boys arrived at the court of the King, the Lord High Chamberlain, who was a very great man indeed, and attended to everything about the Emperor's household, took the boys into the school for the young Princes of the kingdom, gave them comfortable rooms, and appointed them their places at the table.

Now, you must know that these four young Hebrew Princes worshipped the only true God and had been brought up, in what we would call to-day, Christian families. Their parents had taught them to pray three times a day, looking towards the east, where their temple stood.

They had also been taught to keep their bodies clean outside with many washings, and inside by eating simple food and drinking only water.

So you can imagine how they felt when they were put down the first

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day to a table loaded with heavy meats, and wine in great high goblets served with every course.

The native Princes ate and drank freely, and some of them drank entirely too much, and had such headaches afterwards that they could not study for several hours.

Daniel—for that is the name of the young Prince I am telling you about—Daniel and his three schoolmates selected what they could eat, without breaking any of God's commands, and then drew apart by themselves for a consultation as soon as the meal was over.

Daniel was the spokesman and he said, "We never can defile ourselves with this food and wine. Our only hope in this foreign country, where we are prisoners, is to ask God to take care of us; and we can not do this, nor expect His help if we disobey Him and drink and carouse and go against all our home training. I, for one, vote that we do the right thing and trust Him to take care of the consequences."

So they took a vote and every boy voted with Daniel.

This was really the first Temperance Society in the whole world.

The next question was how to accomplish what they had planned. You see, they were prisoners and mere lads, only about 14 or 16 years of age; and they were under the full control of a man who had the power to punish them and to compel them to eat, and drink what he set before them, one who could even go so far as to cut off their heads if they disobeyed. As you will see later in the story, they were captives in a land where the great and powerful monarch cut off people's heads for a great deal less than actual disobeying his commands.

It took a good deal of courage and a good deal of sturdy, honest faith in God, to do as these boys did.

But they knew they were right so they drew up their resolutions—Firstly, not to eat rich, highly seasoned meat; Secondly, not to drink intoxicating wine.

Daniel, who had been elected President, said, "I move that a committee

of one be appointed to visit the Lord High Chamberlain, and to ask him to give us an opportunity to keep true to our religion by serving us vegetables, bread and water, and the simple foods which we are allowed to eat. To ask him to test us for ten days and see if at the end of the ten days we do not weigh more and have clearer brains for our lessons, than the other boys who eat this rich food. Then if the test is a success, as we know it is bound to be, he will agree to let us keep on with this diet."

Now this was such a wise plan that they all voted at once for it and unanimously elected Daniel to be their spokesman to the Lord High Chamberlain.

They also agreed that they would stick to their vow, come what would, and would be loyal to God and to their home training and pray regularly three times a day, looking towards Jerusalem, their holy city, and trust God to bless and take care of them.

Then they stood up, facing Jerusalem, and with bowed heads, and hands folded on their breasts, repeated together the prayer their mothers had taught them at home.

"Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice; have mercy also upon me and answer me.

When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.

Hide not Thy face far from me; put not Thy servant away in anger; Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.

Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies."

Of course God was keeping watch over these boys all the time, and as He always does for His own children, He was preparing the answer to the boys' prayer even before they made it. So He had caused the Lord High Chamberlain to take a great fancy to Daniel, who was very bright,

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intelligent, quick at his lessons, and always courteous to every one around him.

The Lord High Chamberlain had never had a pupil he thought so well of before, and so when Daniel requested an interview with him, he was very willing to grant it.

Daniel put the case before him in a very courteous way. He told him the food and wine were absolutely forbidden by his religion, and besides he felt that he and his friends would be stronger physically, and brighter mentally, if they were given the simpler diet; and all that he had come to ask of him was that his request be given a fair trial.

But the Lord High Chamberlain said he did not see how he could do it, because he was responsible to the King for the condition of the boys, and if the King sent for them and found that Daniel and his friends were thin and ill-fed and dull in their work, he, the Lord High Chamberlain, would be severely reprimanded and perhaps lose his position, or even his head; and of course he did not want to run any such risk as that.

But Daniel argued that there could not be much harm done in ten days' time, and he only asked for a ten days' trial. If at the end of that time they were stronger physically and mentally, then he could use his own judgment about continuing the diet.

That sounded so fair that the Lord High Chamberlain, who really felt sorry that these fine, good looking, well behaved boys had been dragged from their homes, and brought captives into a strange country, was inclined to do all he could for them; and so he consented to the trial.

But Daniel's troubles were not at an end because the Lord High Chamberlain was kind to him and his friends. They had to face the whole school of heathen boys, who made all manner of fun of them. They called them "water-buckets" and "bread-baskets" and "milk-sops" and "mama's darlings" and "goody-goodies," and said they were "tied to their mother's apron strings" and were "the Lord High Chamberlain's little pet lambs," or names that meant the same thing in their language. They tried to force them to eat and drink by slipping meat into the vegetable dishes and

pouring wine into the water pitchers, and even trying to pick quarrels with them on the playground. If you have ever tried to live differently from the crowd around you, especially at a boys' boarding school, you can imagine what Daniel and his three friends had to endure.

Fortunately, they were big, strong, athletic fellows and could whip any one of the heathen boys single handed, especially as the heathen boys were always more or less loggy with their heavy meals and rich wine. So Daniel and his friends had the better of the whole heathen school, which gradually learned to respect them and to keep their distance, for the Hebrews could not only beat them wrestling, jumping, running and boxing, but at their lessons, as well.

I must say it made some bitter enemies for them, for the heathen boys never forgave them for being better than they, and years after, when they were all grown men, holding high offices in the kingdom, you will see how these enemies tried to destroy Daniel and his three friends; and would have succeeded if God had not kept special care over them.

The Lord High Chamberlain kept watching the boys but thought it best to let them fight their own battles; so did not interfere except to put a stop to their being annoyed at meal time. At the end of the ten days the boys were all put through their examinations, that is, they had to strip and bathe and be pounded by slaves and rubbed down with oil, and then weighed and looked over by the Court Physicians; and afterwards they had to answer a number of questions and have their parchments sent in to the Emperor, so that he could tell how this special school for young diplomats was coming on. The boys themselves were dressed in beautiful, costly robes and sandalled with bright red and orange colored leather slippers, and long gold and silver chains were hung around their necks, and they were marched by the Lord High Chamberlain into the presence of the King, who asked them numberless questions and explained to them what he wanted them to learn in his school. It was a trying day for the boys, I can assure you, and the hearts of the four Hebrew boys beat fast when their time came to be weighed and tested.

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But as we know to-day, simple fare, and pure water makes a healthier skin and clearer eye, and a quicker brain. So we are not surprised to find that the Hebrew boys outstripped the rest of the school in every department—athletic—personal appearance—weight—and intelligence.

The Lord High Chamberlain fairly jumped for joy because the King commended him for his excellent care of these foreign Princes, he patted them on the head, and told them to keep on as they were doing and he would soon be able to place them in high positions of authority and wealth.

I do not know whether the Lord High Chamberlain put all the other boys on a vegetable and water diet to make them as strong as the Hebrew boys, but if he did, I am sure they hated Daniel and his friends more than ever, because by this time they had acquired a taste for liquor and would not do without it. But I do know that Daniel and his friends were allowed to keep to their simple fare and had the confidence and respect of the Lord High Chamberlain and all the other court officials in a way none of the other scholars had or ever gained.

CHAPTER II.

THE KING'S DREAM.

THE next thing we hear about Daniel is after he is grown up and has become a wise and important man in the kingdom of his captor, King Nebuchadnezzar by name.



Did you ever hear of such a name? I am afraid you will just have to learn to say it, because this King figures so much in the story. Ne-bu-chad-nezzar—the great and powerful King of Babylon, under whom Daniel and his three friends served as Astronomers and Astrologers, and general Wise-information men.

One day there was a great excitement in the kingdom of Babylon. Royal couriers were riding post haste all over the city on mules, asses, camels, and horses to summon all the Wise Men of the kingdom, the Astrologers and Astronomers, the Sorcerers and Magicians to the King's palaces, because the King, the great Nebuchadnezzar, had had a dream and could not tell what it meant. Now, as dreams always meant something very special in those days, he sent for everybody he could think of to come and tell him the meaning of it.

So there they were—all the Wise Old Men of the kingdom dressed in long fur-trimmed robes, with great big goggles on their little, blinking, winking, wise old eyes. Long chains of gold and silver hanging around their scrawny necks, and big scrolls of parchment, tied with red, and blue, and yellow ribbons, and sealed all over with thick, black and gold seals, in their skinny hands. They all met in the outer court of the King's palace and whispered to one another through their long grey beards, wagging their shaky, old, turbanned heads and rubbing their skinny hands together. They asked each other what it all meant, and why they were hustled so unceremoniously from their books and their scrolls, and their

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ink horns, and their horoscopes up to the King's palace, but no one could tell them the reason.

While they were puzzling their poor, worn-out, old brains over this, a Herald suddenly pulled aside the long, heavy curtain, and six other Heralds blew terrific blasts upon their silver trumpets, and the grand Master of Ceremonies waved his gold and silver wand, and the first thing the poor old Wise Men knew they were being marched in a body, right up to the very throne itself, where King Nebuchadnezzar, the great King of Babylon, sat waiting to receive them.

I must stop long enough to tell you how grand, and royal, and regularly splendid, this King looked seated upon his throne, which was of carved ivory.

The arms of the throne were made to represent winged lions lying down. There were six marble steps going up to it, and on every step was an African slave, waving a great peacock feather fan to keep the flies off King Nebuchadnezzar. A leopard skin rug hung from the back of the throne, and many cushions of crimson and gold were piled high around in order to make a soft seat for the King; for it certainly can not be much fun to sit all day on a hard marble seat, balancing a golden crown on the top of one's head, the way kings used to do.

At any rate that is what King Nebuchadnezzar did, and there he was, all loaded down with embroidered clothes and gold and silver jewels, rings and chains, and buckles and bracelets, and the highest crown you ever saw glittering on the top of his head. In his hand he held a heavy golden scepter; and crowds of Courtiers and Princes and Attendants stood around about him, all eagerly waiting to see what was going to happen; and the most dreadful thing you ever heard of did happen, which scared everyone nearly to death.

When the Grand Chamberlain had succeeded in getting his frightened flock of Wise Old Men up to the foot of the flight of marble steps which led to the throne, they all fell down on their knees, batting their poor old empty heads on the floor and trembling with fear before King Nebuchad-

nezzar. The King then waved his golden scepter and the trumpeteers blew a last long blast on the silver trumpets, and the peacock feather fans stopped waving for a minute, while the King said, in a voice of thunder: "Rise, Wise Men, and give attention to what I have to say."

My, you should have seen those poor frightened old men straighten up. Some had rheumatism so badly you could almost hear their joints crack, and this made some of the Courtiers snicker so loudly that the Grand Chamberlain had to tap them with his wand in order to make them keep quiet, he was so afraid he would lose his own job if the King happened to overhear them.

And then what **do** you think the King told them?

He told them he had had a dream the night before and he commanded them to tell him at once what his dream meant. The flock of Wise Old Men wagged their wise old heads and said "Of a certainty. As soon as the King deigns to tell us the dream we will immediately tell him the interpretation thereof."

"The king answered, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof."

Well, you can imagine the fear that seized upon all those poor old Wise Men and all the other Courtiers who were not so wise, when they heard what the King said, for if he was so unreasonable as to behead a man for not knowing what he dreamed, he might behead the next man for not knowing what he thought.

The Wise Men pleaded, and entreated, and wrung their hands, saying the King had asked an impossible thing; that no King ever lived who had asked such an unreasonable thing of his people before; that if he would only tell the dream they would tell the interpretation thereof, but

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there was not a man in the kingdom who could tell him what he had dreamed.

You see, they were all poor, human, heathen Wise Men; they did not know God and so could not ask God for any help. But when they said there was not a man in the kingdom who could tell the King his dream they were mistaken, because there was a man, a man much wiser than they, because he did not depend upon human wisdom, but upon God, who gives wisdom to those that seek it from Him. This man was our young friend, Prince Daniel, who had made up his mind as a boy to do what was right and trust God to take care of him.

Now, in the meantime, while the poor old Wise Men were wringing their hands and pleading to have their lives spared, the King was growing angrier and angrier every moment, and finally he waved his golden scepter and ordered everyone of them off to prison to have their heads cut off in the morning, for he said he would not support a crowd of fools in his kingdom who could not answer a simple question when he asked them. Of course you will see from this that King Nebuchadnezzar was a very great, and powerful being who made every one do just as he said—the kind of a King we would all like to be if we were going to be kings at all.

If the morning had been a busy day in the kingdom of Babylon, the evening was a far busier one, for all the Wise Men in the kingdom were tearing their hair and sobbing, and crying, and saying good bye to their wives and children, and the Royal Couriers were again riding all over the city to see if every Wise Man in it had been arrested and brought up to the prison, to get his head cut off in the morning.

I do not know how our friend Daniel happened to be overlooked in the morning, when the Wise Men were called to the palace to see the King; but he was. However, when it was time to be beheaded, he was on hand. Only he told the Captain of the King's guard who brought him up to the prison to send in to the King and tell him that there was one of his Wise Men who had just arrived who wished to speak with him alone, as he thought he would be able to answer the King's question.

This message was sent in to the King, and the King was so eager to remember what he had dreamed, and to be told its meaning, that he allowed Daniel to be brought into his presence, and Daniel bowed at the foot of the throne, as the other Wise Men had done, and when the King extended the golden scepter to him and told him to rise up and speak, Daniel said, "Oh, King, live forever." (That was the polite way they addressed kings in those days, whether they meant it or not.) "Give thy servant but a little time and I will give thee the answer to thy question as to what thou hast dreamed and the interpretation thereof."

The King told him to take his time, but be quick about it, if he did not make good his word, every head of every Wise Man in the kingdom (except the King's, of course) would come right off; and that would be the end of all of them, and it would have been the end of this tale too; only it was not, because God meant otherwise, as you will see in a moment.

As soon as Daniel left the King's palace he went straight to his three friends, the boys who had been brought as captives with him, and as soon as he found them he explained the whole situation and told them the danger they, as well as all the other Wise Men of the kingdom, were in.

So these men, just as they had done when they were boys, opened the windows of their room towards Jerusalem, and stood with bowed heads and clasped hands and prayed God, who alone is Wisdom and Might, to reveal to them, if it was His holy will, the dream and the interpretation thereof, and to turn the heart of the King from his wicked plan of killing innocent men who could not answer him his question.

While these men stood praying in the moonlight, Daniel saw a vision and knew instantly it was the same vision which the King had seen, and that God had heard and answered his prayer.

Then Daniel broke out in a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God, saying:

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

And he changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings, and

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setteth up kings; he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter."

As soon as it was daylight Daniel hurried back to the prison and told the Captain of the King's guard to arrange an audience with the King, because he was ready now to tell the King his dream and the interpretation thereof. The other Wise Men could hardly believe their ears when they heard this, but waited breathlessly to see if Daniel could make good his word.

This time there was not half the fuss about the interview with the King as there had been the day before, because the King was so eager to know whether Daniel could tell him his dream, that he became more like a mere man, and less like an artificial king. He forgot his crown and never waited for the feather fans, but waved the flies off with his own royal hand, which, by the way, did not even have the scepter in it; he had forgotten it, he was in such a hurry when he dressed for this exciting interview.

When Daniel was brought in and bowed himself before him the King, King Nebuchadnezzar just waved his hand and told him to stand upright and tell him if he really knew what he had dreamed and what the interpretation was. Daniel rose quietly and stood before the King and replied in these words:

"The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the King;

But there is a God in Heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these."

Then he pictured the King's dream. "In thy dream, oh King," he

said, "thou sawest a great image, the colossal figure of a man. The man's head was of burnished gold; the man's arms and breast of shining silver; the man's waist and thighs were of brass; the legs of iron; with feet made partly of clay and partly of iron. And while thou wast gazing upon this terrible image, lo! and behold! a great stone loosened itself from a nearby mountain, rolled down the mountain and suddenly struck the image upon the feet. Whereupon the entire image collapsed and broke up into thousands of pieces; yes, into actual dust; and was blown away by a strong wind, while the stone which had smitten the image grew larger and larger until it filled the whole earth."

Nebuchadnezzar could hardly believe his own ears, because as Daniel spoke he could see exactly the whole vision just as he had seen it in his dream the night before.

"Now," continued Daniel, "**that** is the vision which God has revealed to me, and **this** is the interpretation thereof which He also has given.

"Thou, O King, art a King of Kings. God has made thee so. Thou art the head of gold. After thee shall come another kingdom, not so powerful nor so strong; this is the breast and arms of silver. After that shall come a third, even less strong and beautiful. This is the thigh and waist of brass. And lastly a kingdom shall come of iron rule—strong but divided into two parts; and less regal than any that went before. In the end shall clay—a very weak material—be mixed with the iron rule, and when this last comes to pass and a mixed multitude rules in place of a glorious and powerful monarch like thyself, then God will set up a kingdom of His own choosing which shall demolish all kingdoms which have ever gone before, and this kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and shall rule from one end of the earth unto the other, and shall stand forever." **This** is the vision and **this** is the interpretation thereof which God has seen fit to reveal to King Nebuchadnezzar, that he may know what God will do in the future with this great kingdom over which he now rules."

The King was so overcome with Daniel's wisdom and accuracy and knowledge, with the fact that only God could have revealed this mys-

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tery to him, that he rose right off his throne and came down the marble steps and bowed himself before Daniel and worshipped Daniel's God and ordered gifts to be brought and rich presents, and decorated him right then and there and made him the chief of all his Wise Men and Governors.

Nor were Daniel's three friends forgotten; they also were given high positions of authority and trust, and so God honored and rewarded these boys who had been loyal and faithful to Him at all times both as boys and as men. And He blessed them and made them a blessing to this heathen nation, and He in the end made them the means of converting this heathen monarch Nebuchadnezzar to the worship of the true God.

I tell you, children, if we are faithful to God, we never know how he will use us, or bless us, nor how He will make our lives a blessing to others.

Now when you all grow older you will be interested in your study of history to see how this dream and the meaning of it has come true.

Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom of Babylon was the greatest and most powerful kingdom the world has ever seen. (And he was the most autocratic monarch.) But following his golden reign came the weaker kingdom of the Medes and Persians, represented in the dream by the silver arms. While this was followed by the kingdom of the Greeks, represented by the breast and thighs of brass. And then came the iron rule of Rome, which you will remember divided into two parts, Eastern and Western, represented by the legs of iron. To-day we see the clay in the rule by the people, called democracies, joined with the Roman form of government, called monarchy, which is only enforced by an iron military system from time to time.

God's kingdom, which is yet to come, will be the stone which shall shatter all the other kingdoms, and this will be done by the coming back again of our Lord Jesus Christ, who tells us He is "The Stone." This kingdom, ruled over by Christ himself, will be an everlasting and righteous kingdom and shall endure forever.

CHAPTER III.

THE GOLDEN IMAGE.

THE next thing I am going to tell you about is one of the most wonderful things that ever happened in the world, and every word of it is true.



One day King Nebuchadnezzar was walking up and down his marble balcony looking over his beautiful, glittering city of Babylon which lay at his feet, and over that to the green and fertile fields beyond the city—far over to the blue and purple mountains which stretched miles and miles away in the distance. As he looked he thought how powerful he was. That he owned all this great country and that he was King over all these millions of people of all races and colors and creeds, and thinking thus he grew very much puffed up and quite forgot what Daniel had told him about only being King by the grace of God. King Nebuchadnezzar did what numbers of other people have done before and since, when they grow rich and powerful, he forgot God.

He decided therefore that he would have an enormous image made of himself, all of gold, showing him in his regal robes with his chains, and rings, and bracelets of gold and precious stones, with his high and heavy crown upon his head, and his golden scepter in his hand. Then he would have this Golden Image placed in the center of an immense open field, where it could be seen for miles around. Then he would send the Royal Couriers all over his dominion and summon the leaders of his people, the Princes and the Governors, the Captains and the Judges, the Treasurers and the Counsellors, the Sheriffs, and the Rulers, and everybody who was anybody to come to a great feast, in this immense plain. Here he would have a tremendous orchestra and when it played he would command all the people to shout and fall down and bow to the colossal golden figure of

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himself, and make it a religious ceremony and a mark of loyalty to himself in which everyone would have to join.

He also decided that for fear some of the people might refuse, and so his authority would be weakened, to have an immense round furnace built of brick, with a wide coping running around the top and an oven door in the side. This would be fed with wood, and straw, and kept at white heat. If any one dared to refuse to bow down and worship his Golden Image he would command his officers to cast them into the blazing fire, and if he threatened this, who was there in the whole kingdom of King Nebuchadnezzar who would dare refuse to obey his command?

It was all done as his wicked mind planned. The Golden Image was made. I do not know whether it was solid gold or a wooden figure covered with gold. But I do know it was 18 feet high and 18 feet wide, and that it glittered, and sparkled, and shimmered in the sun so that every eye was dazzled that tried to look upon it. It fairly frightened the people it looked so more than human.

Then, too, it was a marvelous sight to see thousands of people coming into the great plain, in the center of which the image stood. The journey being a long one and the festival keeping up for several days, many had come on camels, and mules, and dromedaries bringing their tents and household goods with them.

It looked like a great fair or circus day. Near the Golden Image men were laying the bricks for the dreadful furnace into which anyone who refused to fall down and worship this terrible idol was to be cast.

I know you are wondering where Daniel and his three friends were in all this excitement and what they were going to do about worshipping the idol, and I must tell you at once. I do not know where Daniel was, for he never appeared at all. As we know he was the bravest of the brave and never shirked any danger, so I am sure he must have either been away on official business, and so did not know anything about the Golden Image, or else he was sick abed and so was excused from coming. But the three friends were there and it is about them I am going to tell you.

First of all, I must give you their names—dreadful jaw-breaking names they were, too—but I am afraid you will have to try to learn them, because you will want to be able to call them by name when you grow up, and read about them for yourselves.

Their names were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I wish for your sakes they had been Tom, Dick and Harry; but they were not; so we can not help it.

Now, these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were very prominent and important governors, so they were obliged to appear at court, when commanded by the King. But they did not have to obey the King when he ordered them to disobey God, for God's laws come first, no matter what any king says.

You remember the commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments." Daniel's three friends were determined to keep this commandment. You may be sure they had all prayed about this wicked order, and they had bound themselves together once more by a solemn vow to obey God at any cost, and never bow down to any heathen image.

After everything for the festival had been completed, and the last brick had been laid in the oven, and the wood, and the straw had been piled up near by, ready to use in case of need, The Trumpeter blew a fanfare (that means a loud blast) and the great procession started from the palace towards the Field-of-the-Image-of-Gold.

My! it was more splendid than any circus parade you have ever seen, because everything about it was real. There was not any make believe paste jewels, or tinsel for gold, or cotton for fur. No, indeed; every jewel was a real gem; every chain was solid gold; the fur was real ermine;

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and the velvets, and silks, and satins were the richest and the rarest that could be bought.

When the crowds waiting in the plain, saw the procession coming in all its splendor, they were as ready to fall down and worship it, as they were the Golden Image for whom all this magnificence was arranged.

First, came the Priests in yellow silk robes; next came the Generals in glittering armor; next the Judges in black velvet and ermine; next the Nubian slaves waving the peacock feather fans; and right in the midst of this grandeur rode the King in a golden palanquin (that is, a chair carried by poles on the shoulders of four giant slaves), and he looked so like the Golden Image except that he was smaller, you could hardly tell which was which. But he did not **feel** any smaller; no, indeed! As King Nebuchadnezzar looked out on that vast throng gathered there to worship **him**, his heart swelled with pride, and vanity, until he felt twice the size of his colossal image.

After the King's palanquin came more Officers and Governors and Sheriffs and everybody who was anybody, and a great many who were nobodies, but managed to squeeze in. It took a long time to get them all settled on the tiers and tiers of wooden benches which circled round the huge image, with the furnace beside it shooting out threatening flames.

After the King was comfortably seated with the tiger skin robe underneath and the crimson velvet pillows piled high at his back, he waved his scepter and the great throng grew silent to hear the Heralds read the proclamation. They did not have megaphones in those days; but they did have big silver trumpets, which answered very well. The Heralds were stationed at short intervals around the grounds, so that all the people could hear the words of the proclamation. And this is what the heralds shouted through their silver trumpets:

"To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages.

That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the Golden Image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up.

And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

When they had finished reading, or rather, shouting the proclamation, there was a dead silence, for the people were frightened nearly to death, especially as the only sound they could hear was the awful crackling of that red hot furnace, which the men kept roaring in order to terrify them and make them obey the King.

King Nebuchadnezzar now rose from his seat and waved his scepter to signal the band to play, and if you have ever heard a jazz band you will know just how this music sounded, for I am sure it was the original of all jazz music. Horns blew, drums beat, cymbals crashed, cornets screamed, sackbuts, psalties and dulcimers, whatever they were, all tooted up; and it certainly deafened everyone's ears, and the noise could be heard for miles around. At the very first note the whole vast multitude, as one man, fell down flat on their faces before that Golden Image and shouted as with one voice, "Nebuchadnezzar, he is the god! Nebuchadnezzar, he is the god!"

Did I say everyone fell down on his face? Well, I did not mean that, for three men and three alone stood bolt upright in their places and never moved a muscle. And these three were Daniel's three friends—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

You will remember that I told you, when these boys were in boarding school and refused to eat the rich meats and drink the wines which the other boys had, that they made enemies who waited until they grew up to try and injure them.

These enemies must have been looking out of the corner of one eye, in spite of their bowing before the Golden Image, to have seen that these three men remained standing.

However that was, those men saw the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to bow down to the Golden Image, and immediately ran and told the King. The King was now so puffed up over his whole performance, and so proud of the absolute control which he exercised over these

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millions of people, that it made him furious to think that three foreign captives, should disobey and defy him.

So he roared with rage, and had the men brought before him instantly. Then he asked them if the accusation, that they had refused to bow down and worship the Golden Image, was true. They said it was only too true, that they never had, and they never would, bow to any but the One and only true God, and worship Him alone.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar flew into a violent rage and ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than before, and pointing to it he furiously commanded them to bow at once to the Golden Image, at the next blast of the trumpets, or pay the penalty by death in the roaring fiery furnace, and he sneeringly asked, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

Alas! King Nebuchadnezzar had much to learn about God, and he himself had to pass through a fiery furnace of affliction before he learned to know that no man could deliver out of God's hand, and that God would never give His worship to another.

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego heard the ultimatum of the King, they drew themselves up more erect than ever, and stiffened their necks even stiffer than before, and made this immortal reply:

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O King.

But if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the Golden Image which thou hast set up."

Oh! what courageous, faithful men they were. How God must have loved them, because they trusted Him wholly and were willing to die if that was His will, rather than deny Him.

We forget all this sometimes, but Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not forget it and were willing to die for their faith.

So because they still refused to obey the King's wicked command he ordered them to be seized and bound, just as they were in all their of-

ficial robes, and to be cast into the heart of the glowing, burning furnace whose flames were now shooting upwards to the sky.

The multitude stood silent, spellbound, horror-stricken, speechless; not a voice was raised in their behalf, but they needed no man to plead for them, for God was their guardian and their protector, and what could man do against them?

Their accusers carried them bound to the mouth of the furnace, and as they lifted them up in their arms to cast them into the furnace, the tongues of flame leaped out and instantly burned to a crisp those men who were carrying them, while Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego fell unharmed into the center of the glowing coals.

A great roar arose from the multitude, louder than the roar of the furnace. The King rose in terror from his throne; his hair stood on end; he could not believe his eyes; he trembled like a leaf; the sweat rolled off him like water; his knees knocked together; he fell forward on his face and had to be supported by his attendants; for as he looked into that furnace he saw these three men whom he had cast in, walking unharmed, untouched, uninjured, and with them a fourth man, of God-like form, who walked with them and protected them from the burning flame.

The very same fire that destroyed their enemies had no power to hurt a single hair of their heads, for God was with them and threw His protecting arms around them, and in the person of His own Son sheltered them in the midst of the fire.

Oh! it was marvelous. But just like God. We must remember that in those days God gave miraculous exhibitions both of His power and of His mercy because they had not the written Word of God as we have it to-day.

When the King could get breath enough to speak he whispered, "Take me nearer." So they carried him as near to the blazing furnace as they dared and held him up as he tried to speak.

Poor Nebuchadnezzar! He was a very different man from the one who had been so proudly carried into the arena to receive the worship and

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praise of men. Now, he was shaken to his very soul, for he was in the presence of the God whom he had defied and insulted, and there was no strength in him.

His crown had fallen off, and no man had dared to pick it up; his scepter had slipped from his nerveless fingers; his rich clothes were saturated and stained with perspiration; his face was blanched and white. All his glory and his pride were in the dust, and he was now a humble suppliant for Divine mercy.

The flames had died down, for terror had seized the men who were feeding them, and they had fled for their lives.

The King, when he was near enough to be heard, commanded Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come forth, which they immediately did. And there was not a hair of their heads singed; nor a garment burned; nor the smell of smoke upon them. Truly their God had sheltered them under His wing. And what flame has power over the sheltering wing of the Almighty?

It was now Nebuchadnezzar's time to fall down and worship the true God, and this he did and issued a decree that if any one in his domain, should ever say a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego they should have their houses seized, their lands forfeited and they themselves be hewn into a dozen pieces.


Poor man! His ruling passion was strong in death—that passion of making people obey him at any cost. But after all, he was only a poor heathen monarch, and it took a great deal of discipline and experience to teach him the true way in which to rule.

The faithfulness and courage of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego taught the King, and the whole nation the power of the true God, and all admitted now that none other than God could ever have saved men out of such a fiery experience. King Nebuchadnezzar loaded them with benefits and gave them even higher positions in the kingdom than they held before.

I do not know what became of the great Golden Image, but it disappeared one night and was never seen again.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAD KING.

T was not very long after this terrible experience of King Nebuchadnezzar's until he had another dream, and this time he remembered it in the morning, and told it to all the Astronomers, and Astrologers, and Wise Men of the kingdom. But even after telling it there was not one of them who could interpret its meaning to him.

So the King said, "Fortunately I have one man in the kingdom who goes to God for his wisdom, and therefore he is able to tell me the truth about my dreams; send for Daniel." And they did.

When Daniel arrived the King told him his dream, and this is what it was:

He thought that he saw a tree grow and grow until its top was out of sight, in the clouds of Heaven, and multitudes of birds nested in its many wide spreading branches, and numbers of animals of all kinds and sizes sheltered themselves at its base, and all were fed by this great and wonderful tree.

And then he saw an angel fly down from heaven and cry:

"Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves and scatter his fruits; let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches:

Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field: and let it be wet with the dew of Heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth:

Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him."

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Of course King Nebuchadnezzar could not understand what such a strange dream meant. So he said, "I have sent for all my Magicians, and Astrologers, and Astronomers, and Wise Men, to tell me what the interpretation of it is, and they can not. But I know, oh Daniel, beloved of thy God, that God reveals secrets to thee that he tells to no one else. Tell me the meaning of my dream."

But Daniel said he would have to be alone for an hour or two, to pray to God and find out if He wished the King to know the interpretation of his dream.

Of course the King gave Daniel permission to go off by himself into a little ante-room, to pray and ask God for the meaning, while he paced impatiently up and down his marble balcony, looking out over the great city of Babylon, of which he was so proud. For you must know that the King's heart was still proud, in spite of the lesson he had received, when he set up his Golden Image.

At the end of an hour the Herald announced Daniel, who was at once ushered into the King's presence. His face was sad and anxious because the dream meant sorrow and suffering for the King, and Daniel disliked to be the one to tell him so.

The King however would not wait, but was impatient to hear the interpretation of the dream, whether it was good or bad. So Daniel had nothing to do but obey, and this is what he told him:

First, he said the dream meant that the high and spreading tree which the King had seen was a picture of himself, as head of this great and growing nation. That the birds which roosted in the branches and the animals which sheltered under the tree, represented the many races, and tribes, and nationalities of men who came under his rule, all of which were nourished by his kingdom. That alas! in place of his greatness and power making King Nebuchadnezzar humble and faithful to God, his pride and his vanity had increased until he was no longer fit to rule, and God was about to cut him off in the midst of his greatness, just as the tree had been cut off at the roots. This cutting off would not be by any

human means but by a Divine dispensation of Providence, which means from God alone.

As the stump of the tree was however bound around by brass and iron bands, in the grass of the field, and after a time sprouted again, so King Nebuchadnezzar, after his affliction, would be restored to his kingdom and know then that God alone was King, and that He gave power to whom He pleased, and took it away when He pleased.

Daniel loved the King so much and grieved so over this dream and its meaning, that he begged the King to humble himself now before Almighty God and ask Him to give him a new heart, before all these troubles should come upon him.

But King Nebuchadnezzar was like a good many people today who will not listen to God when everything is going well with them. He rejected His message until it was too late, and God's discipline had to fall.

A year rolled by. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was greater than ever; his fame had spread to distant lands; there had never been a king so strong, so powerful, so feared.

One sunny afternoon as he paced up and down his marble balcony and looked again over his glittering city and fertile fields, and thought of all the peoples he controlled, and how men obeyed his slightest nod, his heart was lifted up and filled with pride, and vanity, and he spoke aloud, saying:

"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?"

And just as the blasphemous words fell from his lips his ears heard a voice behind him, saying:

"O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from thee.

And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will."

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And when his attendants came to call him to the banquet, which was spread, and waiting for him inside the palace, to their horror they found their monarch on all fours, pacing like a wild beast up and down the marble balcony. His clothes were torn from him; his beard dragging in the dust; his eyes rolling in his head; while the only sound he was able to make resembled the barking of a dog, or the growling of some wild animal. And this he did, yapping, and slobbering, and growling, until everyone fled in terror, and left him to himself.

Of course they told Daniel, and Daniel knew immediately that the Angel from heaven had smitten the proud head, and the tree was hewn down, and the great Nebuchadnezzar would have to live like the beast he had been, until his punishment was complete.

Daniel had them appoint keepers for him, and he was given a house with grounds around it, where he ate grass like the oxen, and lay out in the wet dews almost naked, and was so wild and dangerous that no one dared go near him to cut his hair, or trim his beard, or even pare his nails. So all grew untrimmed until his hair looked like the feathers of an eagle, and his nails like an eagle's claws. Who seeing him now would ever have imagined that this creature was the same who had been carried in a golden palanquin to see a golden figure of himself put up as a god and worshipped by a multitude of thoughtless, ignorant people?

Well, the dream all came true just as God had shown to Daniel it would. When the time appointed for Nebuchadnezzar's discipline was completed and the seven years had passed over his head, he lifted up his insane eyes one day to the heavens above, and the minute he looked up to God, God sent his reason back to him.

Then, when his reason was restored he looked at his long, straggly beard, his wild, loose hairs, his claw-like nails, his naked, toughened body, and he remembered the words of the Most High God spoken to him by Daniel the Prophet.

He fell upon his face and cried with his enlightened reason to God to

forgive him and to restore him, and he acknowledged that God alone was Lord; and that He gave His kingdom to whomsoever He would.

So Nebuchadnezzar was finally converted to faith in the true God, through these dreadful afflictions which bowed his proud head in the dust.

As soon as his attendants saw that his mind was restored, they flew again to Daniel to tell him the good news, and it did not take long for Daniel to come and have all the Court Barbers, and all the Court Tailors, and all the Court Jewelers busy over poor King Nebuchadnezzar's dreadfully emaciated, filthy body; and in a few hours they made him look like a new man.

Bathed in clean water; anointed with sweet perfumes; shaved and trimmed and clothed and in his right mind, a perfect picture of what the Lord Jesus does for every poor sinner who ever comes to his senses and asks Him to receive and forgive and restore him.

If any one will do this, whether beggar or king, his old sins will be all washed away, a new heart will be given him, and clean robes of righteousness put upon him and he will be so different, no one will ever believe he was that old mad-man sinner whom no one could tame.

Well, the whole nation rejoiced together when they saw King Nebuchadnezzar mount his throne again.

He reigned a great many more years, but never again did he build a golden image of himself or throw men into fiery furnaces for not worshipping him. Never again did he walk his marble balcony puffed up with pride and vanity, defying the God who gave him all these responsibilities.

No, no, it was not only a new mind that King Nebuchadnezzar received when he lifted up his eyes to God and to heaven, but it was a new heart. For now he loved his people better than himself, and taught them to worship the true God in place of himself, and so he walked humbly and softly with his God, and his last words were:

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

CHAPTER V.

THE WRITING ON THE WALL.

WHEN Nebuchadnezzar died a new king came to the throne, who was his grandson, a young and very inexperienced boy who was as wicked as he was inexperienced. He had not learned from his grandfather's life, that being a king was a trust given by God, and to be used for God, but he made the same fatal mistake his grandfather had made in his earlier days, that of thinking that he owned the kingdom and the people and the world, and that he could do as he pleased and treat the people as he pleased, and that as long as he had his own way, it did not matter what happened to anybody else.



Well, Belshazzar (for that was this King's name) was a very wicked King, and during his reign he paid not the slightest attention to the Hebrew captive Wise Men—Daniel and his three friends—and never consulted them as his grandfather had done.

Indeed, he was so busy carousing with the other young princes of the kingdom, who were as weak and as silly and as wicked as he was, that he forgot these Wise Men altogether, and had never laid his two eyes upon any one of them.

One day Belshazzar, having nothing better to do, decided to give the largest feast that had ever been given in the kingdom to his young companions. That was the only great thing his puny brain could think of doing in order to distinguish his reign—be more of a glutton than anyone else—eat and drink until nobody could eat or drink any more, and then call it a great day in the history of his life.

My, my, how many Belshazzars there have been in the world since. Big eaters and big drinkers and little every other way.

Well, invitations were sent out for this wonderful banquet, written on

soft yellow scrolls of parchment; lettered in gold; tied with scarlet and gold ribbons; and sealed all over with the King's royal seal. Royal couriers went scurrying all over the kingdom, scattering these precious parchment scrolls right and left, inviting all the Princes and Governors, Lords and Ladies, and all manner of important people—or people who thought they were important (which, by the way, is a very different thing) to come to the King's palace in Babylon on a certain day to feast there with the King.

Of course everybody invited came, and a great many who were not invited, for where "there is a will there is a way," and people fought for those parchment scrolls as if they had been tickets to heaven. Those that were not invited, who thought they ought to be, were very angry and the invitations really made as many enemies for the King as they did friends.

At last the great day arrived, and in spite of heart-burnings, and hair-pullings, and bribery and corruption, at least a thousand people who had been invited, more or less, arrived at the King's palace and were given seats at the King's table and the big eating event commenced.

Did I say "were given seats at the King's table?" Well, I did not quite mean that, because at this banquet of which I am telling you, in that land so far away and so long ago, they did not sit at tables for their meals, as we do, but they reclined on couches, leaning on one elbow and reaching with the other hand to a very low table in front of them for their food.

It must have been a remarkable sight to see a room large enough to hold one thousand couches placed down the sides of long, low tables. These tables were loaded with silver and gold dishes; silver and gold flagons; silver and gold goblets; and great piles of fruit from every known country in the world; while flowers were profusely scattered everywhere. The couches upon which the guests reclined were covered with gay silks, many colored velvets; skins of animals; and heaped high with rich cushions.

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The guests too must have looked very grand, sparkling with jewels and dressed in as many colors of the rainbow, as a peacock has in his tail.

A great many of the guests felt just as vain as any peacock, and thought because a wicked, silly King had invited them to come and eat and drink more than they needed, that they were very important people, and never knew that they were as weak and as silly to come as the King was to invite them.

Then there were hundreds of Nubian slaves running around in their bare feet, filling up the goblets as fast as they were emptied, bringing in steaming dishes of baked meats, and rich puddings, and it was all very hot, and very exciting, and very bad, for everybody concerned, and a very wicked waste of time and money.

But bad as I have told you the banquet was, after Belshazzar had eaten, and drunk entirely too much, he thought of an even more wicked thing to do, and ordered the golden vessels belonging to the Temple of the Jews to be brought for him and his wicked guests to drink from.

To make you realize the wickedness of this order, I must take you back a little in the story and remind you that King Nebuchadnezzar had marched against Jerusalem, some years before, conquered it, and taken away captive many of its people, among whom were our friends Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

When King Nebuchadnezzar did this he carried away from the holy Temple of the Jews all the golden and silver vessels which God had ordered made for His service alone. These holy goblets had been carefully locked up by Nebuchadnezzar in a safe vault, and never touched from that day to this, and the Jews always hoped that if they ever regained their freedom, that they would be allowed to carry their sacred vessels back home with them.

But to Belshazzar nothing was sacred but his own wicked will, and so as he became more and more intoxicated he decided that he would show his thousand Lords and Ladies how little he feared the God of the Jews or

any other god for that matter, and he determined to drink them a toast out of these sacred goblets.

A good many of his companions who were not quite as intoxicated as he was, tried to restrain him, for they, bad as they were, were afraid to tamper with dedicated, or holy things, and they respected the God of the Jews, even if they had not learned to obey him. So they said all they could, but to no purpose. The more they opposed, the more stubborn the drunken King became. He gave the order, and in a short time the holy vessels were placed before him.

The immense banqueting room was lighted by thousands and thousands of candles, which were placed in high candelabrum all around the room, and suspended in large silver chandeliers from the ceiling. The floor was made of marble mosaics in rich and beautiful colors, and the pillars, supporting the ceiling, were of carved marble.

The sides of the wall were plastered, tinted a soft, warm red, which showed clear and rich under the brilliant light of the many candles.

When the gold and silver goblets which had been brought from the vault in which they had been stored, were placed before King Belshazzar's couch, the King raised himself a little on his unsteady elbow and ordered his numerous slaves who were standing around, to pour the wine from the golden flagons into the golden goblets until they were brimming over, and then handing them to the men and the women nearest him he shouted in a drunken voice :

"Come pledge me the gods of gold and silver and brass and iron, wood and stone, for who is the God of the Hebrews and what is His name?—and —" and at that moment suddenly the golden goblet fell from the King's shaking hand, crashing to the marble floor. His eyes started from their sockets; his face grew ashy pale; his hair stood on end; his teeth chattered and his knees knocked together as if he had the palsy; while the perspiration streamed from every pore.

The slaves held him up in a sitting position or he would have rolled upon the floor. Every eye in the hall was upon him and a silence as of

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death fell upon the whole assembly. The guests were frozen to their seats, and horror was depicted upon every face, for there on the wall directly in front of the King moved a mysterious finger tracing black letters on that crimson plaster. The moving finger wrote, and having writ moved on, but the letters remained and stared down at the drunken revelers, now shocked into sobriety and quaking with fear.

"What is it?" cried the King when he could speak. "What means this sign? Oh! what means it?"

Send for my Wise Men. Send with all haste. Bring me a man to tell me who has written and what is its message."

Royal Couriers flew here and there and everywhere, summoning all the King's heathen Astronomers, Astrologers and Wise Men to the banqueting hall.

Hastily they entered by twos and threes, shocked at the horrid scene of revelry which met their eyes. Goblets were overturned everywhere; wine lay in pools upon the marble floor; food was heaped in piles upon tables and benches; fruit and flowers lay scattered in all directions, trampled under foot by the terror-stricken slaves.

Women were weeping and many had fainted upon the disordered couches. Men were ashy white and shaking like aspen leaves, all gazing with fascinated yet terror-stricken eyes upon the fatal wall, where great black letters stood silent witnesses of the presence of an unseen hand.

The candle light was dying down, for no slave had the courage to keep on with his work of replenishing them, but the darker the room grew the brighter shone the handwriting on the wall.

"The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

"We cannot," cried the frightened Wise Men. "It is an enigma, a puzzle. It spells nothing. We cannot make it out."

When the Wise Men said this the King fell in a dead faint upon his couch and the Court Physician had to be summoned to attend him, while in the meantime a report of the whole terrible situation had been carried to the Queen Mother, and just as the physicians were bringing the terrified monarch to his senses she entered the hall.

Ignoring the scenes of revelry which met her eye, she hastened to the King's side and told him to take heart, for she knew of a man in the kingdom, often appealed to by his grandfather King Nebuchadnezzar, who unravelled mysteries and dark sayings that no one else in the kingdom could understand. With these words she sent a courier at once for Daniel, and in the course of a very short time Daniel, the Hebrew captive, the wisest, and best, and noblest of them all, appeared in the doorway.

Oh, how differently he looked from all around him. No wild reveler was he. He had not been summoned to the King's banquet, and if he had been, he would not have come.

Daniel, with his long, flowing beard, in his quiet, black velvet gown, unadorned by chain or ring or any outward sign of his royalty—for Daniel was indeed a prince, a true king among men—Daniel walked to the side of the frightened King and looked at the scene around him. It needed but one glance of his clear piercing eye to take in the entire situation, and understand the meaning of the letters written upon the wall.

He saw the signs of the debauchery all around him, the overturned sacred vessels on the ground; the shaking terror of the weakling King at his feet; the craven fear of the thousand unrighteous banqueters; and the judgment which his God had written above it all.

The King grovelled at his feet, trying to catch his velvet mantle in his shaking fingers, whimpering like a child, offering wealth and power and position and honor, if only Daniel would tell him the meaning of the awful sign.

Moving a little away from the wretched man at his feet, Daniel spoke so all in the hall could hear him.

"Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will

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read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honor :

And for the majesty he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him : whom he would he slew ; and whom he would he kept alive ; and whom he would he set up ; and whom he would he put down.

But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride ; he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him :

And he was driven from the sons of men ; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses ; they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven ; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this ;

But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven ; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them ; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know ; and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified :

Then was the part of the hand sent from him ; and this writing was written.

And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

This is the interpretation of the thing : MENE ; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

TEKEL ; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

PERES ; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

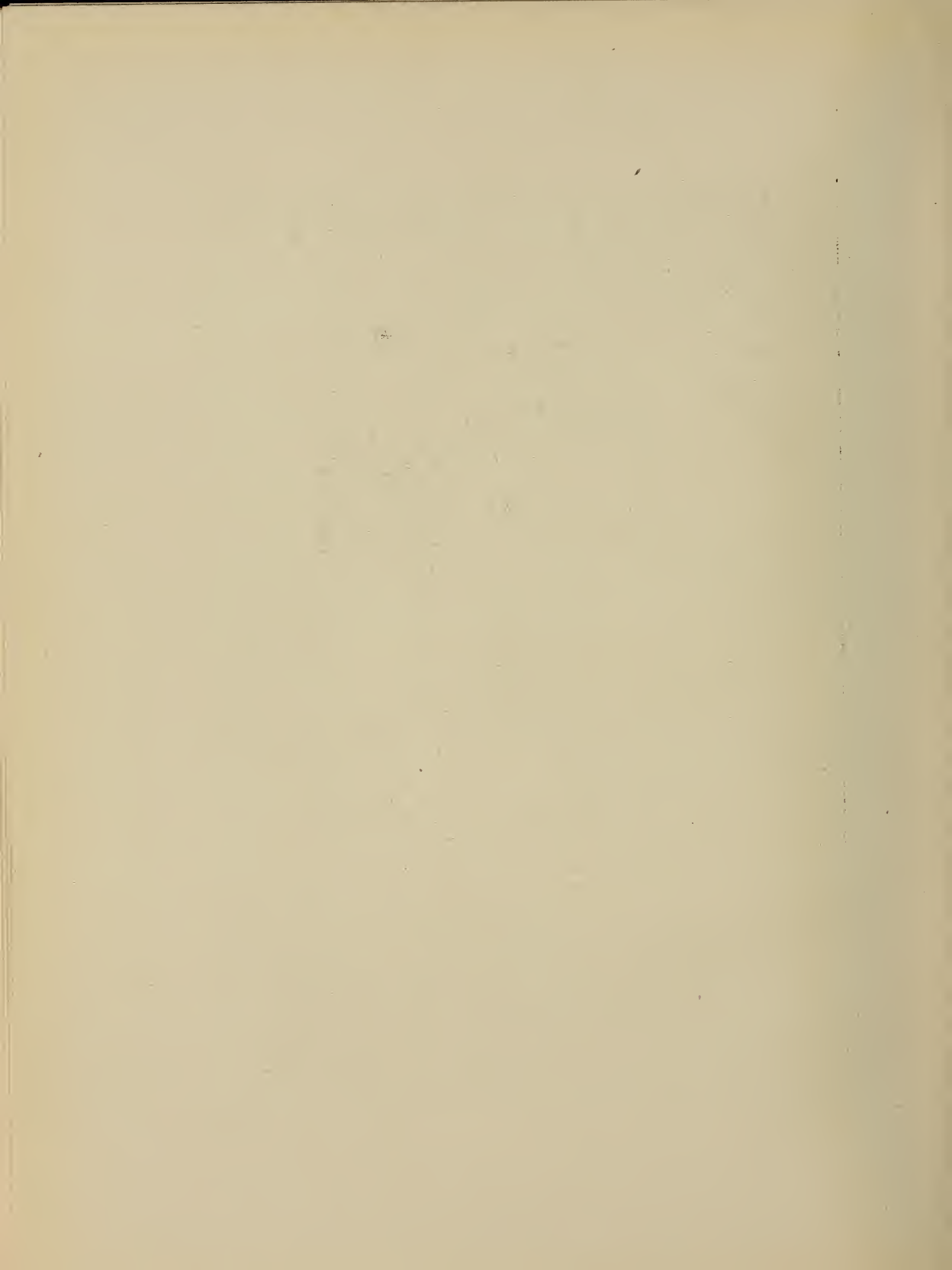
Terrified as the King was at the awful sentence which had just been

pronounced, he yet remembered to reward Daniel, as he had promised, and hung his golden chain about his neck, and wrote a parchment scroll proclaiming him the third ruler in the kingdom.

But God is not mocked, for "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," and as Belshazzar had sown wickedness and debauchery and defiance of God, now while the ink was still wet on the soft surface of the parchment, there came the sound of the tramping of hoofs, and the clang of armor, and the shout of battle, and the door of Belshazzar's great banqueting hall was burst open, and the Medes and Persians rushed in and slew Belshazzar and all of his guests, and so was fulfilled in a moment's time two of God's prophecies.

With Belshazzar's doom came the passing of the head of gold, the golden kingdom of the great Nebuchadnezzar, and the weaker one of the silver arms, or the rule of the Medes and Persians, was ushered in.





CHAPTER VI.

THE LIONS' DEN.

NOW I am sure you are all wondering when Daniel is going to get in and out of the lions' den, as that is the one thing every child knows about Daniel. You will be glad to know that at last we have reached the place, and this is how it all happened.



After Darius, the King of the Medes and the Persians, had slain Belshazzar, the night of his fatal feast, he divided the kingdom of Babylon into large districts, over which he placed Presidents to administer the law, to collect the taxes, and to rule for him generally.

Darius was a very shrewd and clever man in many ways, and one of the ways in which he showed his cleverness was to select the wisest and best men in his kingdom, and then appoint them to places of responsibility. In this way, he was able to govern well and make his reign a successful one.

As soon as he had gained his great victory over Belshazzar, he looked for these various Presidents, and as no one in the whole kingdom was more highly spoken of than Daniel, he at once recognized his worth and appointed him the First President.

Daniel served Darius just as faithfully as he had served his first king, Nebuchadnezzar, because Daniel's service was not for any earthly king, but for his heavenly King, and Daniel lived the life of a Christian, long before the people who did so, were called Christians.

But, as is always the case where there are evil men, his very faithfulness and honesty made him many enemies—enemies who envied him his position and power and yet were unwilling to submit to the God who gave him this power.

You will remember this envy started in the boarding school, when they

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were boys, where Daniel's firmness in refusing to do the things the heathen boys were doing made them angry. So as they had tried to get rid of his three faithful friends in the fiery furnace, they now put their heads together and plotted to get rid of Daniel.

You would have thought their failure in the attempt of the fiery furnace would have taught them a lesson and discouraged them, but Satan, who is back of every wicked man, and back of every evil deed, always makes men think they can get ahead of God the next time, and so Satan keeps them continuing in their wickedness.

These men had tried to bribe Daniel, so as to get some of the revenues he collected, but Daniel had turned from them with such scorn, that they had felt his reproof, and were angrier than ever, and determined to destroy him at all costs, by fair means or foul.

One day a number of these men met, I think it was at the great public baths, for you must know that the Babylonians were great bathers and had wonderful bath houses built for this purpose. Of course, they did not have bath rooms in their own private homes, as we do, so they built large public bathing places, which were club-houses, or general meeting places for pleasure.

You must not think of them as wooden bath houses, such as we have at the seashore. Dear me, no, they were great, huge stone and marble palaces with innumerable smaller rooms grouped around a central swimming pool. A swimming pool which was large enough to hold hundreds of people at a time. This pool was lined with light blue and green tiles which made the water a lovely color, and the water was heated by means of lead pipes which ran into it from the sides, carrying the warm water from big reservoirs, which were kept hot by great ovens outside.

You will hardly believe me when I tell you that there were a number of little trays, like tiny flat boats, floating on the top of the water, holding fruit and wine, so that the bathers could eat and drink.

Well, as I said, I think it was probably at this club that the enemies of Daniel met for their conference. After they had had their morning tub

and their late breakfast and were lounging around the rest-room, where they were all drinking more wine than was good for them, they hatched a mean, contemptible plot against the man who had never done them any harm, except to put them to shame by his own goodness.

They knew that King Darius, while a very clever man in some ways, had one great weakness and that was that he prided himself on never changing his mind. So proud was he of this that if he once made a law it could never, never be altered, and so these laws of the Medes and Persians became what is called unalterable, or fixed.

Daniel's enemies thought if they could only induce the King to make a law that would lead Daniel to break it, they could get his head off without any further trouble. But here were two things that bothered them.

First, King Darius had every confidence in Daniel, loved and trusted him more than anybody in the kingdom, and would never, if he knew it, make a law which would touch a hair of Daniel's head.

And secondly, Daniel himself could not be caught in any wrong because he never broke any of the laws. He did not lie or steal, cheat or bribe, or injure any one. How could they induce him to break a law, even if they persuaded the King to make a new one?

They argued and queried-over this and were just about to give it up, when one younger and brighter than the rest sprang from the couch on which he had been reclining, and said, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God."

My, how pleased they all were with themselves. And what clever fellows they thought themselves to be, that they had hit upon a scheme by which a good man would be trapped to his death, on account of his goodness. It was indeed a devil's scheme, and now you will see how it worked.

After these enemies of Daniel had decided upon the scheme that would trip him, the next thing would be to hit upon a plan that would trap King Darius into doing what they desired, and here they did hit upon the weak

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spot of his character, as they had already hit upon the strong one of Daniel's.

The colossal conceit of the King was his weakness; and so they said, "King Darius, live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not."

Well, it did flatter King Darius to such an extent that he forgot entirely that Daniel was a Hebrew, and never bowed the knee, nor asked a petition of anyone but his own God.

The King was so flattered by the idea of playing the part of a god to his subjects, that his swelled head made him foolish as well as wicked, and he immediately fell into the trap these enemies of Daniel had laid for him.

The decree was written and sent all over the kingdom by the King's Royal Couriers and caused almost as much consternation as that earlier one of King Nebuchadnezzar's, to come to the plain, and worship the Golden Image of himself.

To most people in the kingdom it did not make much difference whom they worshipped or to whom they prayed—a golden image, or a wooden god, or a king's law! it was all the same to them so long as they had food to eat, clothes to wear, money in bank and a good time to look forward to.

But it made a difference to Daniel, just as his enemies knew it would.

No sooner had the law been sent out that "whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions" than Daniel's enemies stationed a watch near his house to see what he was going to do about it.

They had not long to wait. The decree was posted right before Daniel's door, a long parchment scroll nailed to a tree. Daniel came along a little before noon and stopped and read it. The men were hidden some distance

down the street and watched him as he came. After he had read the proclamation he walked into his house, and in a moment they heard a window being raised and a shutter being thrown open. They hurried out from their hiding places and took up their post directly in front of the house, and in a moment were rewarded by seeing the figure of Daniel step to the front of the open window, kneel down before it and looking off towards Jerusalem, move his lips in prayer, and they knew that he had disobeyed the King's command.

There Daniel, the courageous, faithful servant of God, said his prayers on bended knee, as he had done three times daily since he had been a little boy, and had first learned them at his mother's knee.

Brave old Daniel, for he was now old, nearly seventy years of age, and there was only one thing he had been afraid of in all his long, active life, and that was afraid of grieving God, and not keeping true to him.

So he prayed; not more hurriedly and fearfully for fear of death, not less publicly, but just simply and naturally, as he had always done.

My, how delighted the wicked watchers under the tree were. They hardly had time to wag their wicked old heads and say "I told you so," before they were off as fast as their legs could carry them to report to the King, and compel him to carry out his sentence of the lions' den for Daniel.

Now when the King saw the trap, that had been laid for Daniel, into which the King's vanity and folly had brought him, he was terribly angry. Angry at these men who had trapped him; angry at himself for playing the fool; angry at everybody and everything in general; and yet such was his conceit about keeping his word, that he had not the courage to break an evil law and set an innocent man free.

He sent for his Lawyers, and he sent for his Judges, and he tried in every way he could think of, but the right one, to get around this wicked law of his own making without breaking it. But Lawyers and Judges and Counsellors all told him it could not be done; he had written the law; he had sealed it with his kingly seal. "Know, O king, that the law of the

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Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed."

Somehow it does not seem very much worth while being a king if you only have the power of destroying men, and not the power of saving them. The King had the power to save Daniel, but in order to save him he would have to admit that he had been a fool, and it takes a very great and very big man indeed to be willing to do this, especially when it will cause people to laugh at him and perhaps weaken his authority.

So King Darius, much as he loved Daniel, loved King Darius more, and if either had to get the lion's share of trouble, why it would have to be Daniel; that was all.

So Daniel's enemies had their way with him, and to their great joy and glee, the order went forth that because Daniel, the First President of the realm, had disobeyed the King's law, and had offered prayer to his God within the thirty days, he must suffer the penalty of being cast into the den of lions.

So that is how he got in. Now we will see how he got out.

After King Darius had pronounced this sentence upon Daniel, he showed what a coward he was by adding: "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee."

Well, that was not very comforting for Daniel, to expect God to do what Darius ought to have done himself. However, Daniel was not depending upon any human help; he never had, and he certainly was not going to begin at the age of seventy. He knew God and was perfectly willing to trust Him in the lions' den or in the King's palace. Like his three friends, he could say:

"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

However much Darius may have believed that Daniel's God would save him, it did not seem to comfort him, for as soon as Daniel was taken

away, he became very sick and miserable and everything went wrong. He could not eat, he could not sleep; and when his attendants tried to divert him and offered to bring in his orchestra, or his dancing girls, or his court reader, or anything else to amuse him and keep his thoughts off his troubles, he sent them all packing about their business and paced like one of his own pet lions, up and down the palace floor, never winking an eye until daybreak.

But what of Daniel all of this time? Well, after the King had given his command to cast him into the den of lions, his enemies took him away to the royal gardens which surrounded the King's palace, and in which was kept a royal menagerie for the King's amusement. Here were all kinds of net cages containing birds from all over the world, and animals from all parts of the country, penned in dens and pits of many sizes. The most magnificent of all the animals were the King's wild African lions. These were kept in a special den, or pit, and the people used to amuse themselves by throwing pieces of raw meat to them, hearing them roar, as they caught it before ever it touched the bottom.

Many a criminal, too, had been thrown down to them to make their evening meal, for the people in those days were cruel and savage and liked to see the speed with which a lion could rend and eat a man.

The den was lined with smooth stones so the lions could not climb to the top. A wide coping ran all around it, and raised stones were fastened on it from place to place, upon which one immense stone was swung over the whole to admit of ventilation, and yet make a covering for the den.

With strong ropes the keeper now fastened Daniel around the waist in order to lower him into this pit, and then before the gloating eyes of those wicked men who had plotted all this against him, they slowly lowered him, hand over hand, down the smooth sides of the steep and deep den.

The people crowded eagerly around the coping at the top, hearing the horrid roars of the angry beasts who were pacing up and down on the floor below. They expected every moment to see the lions spring upon Daniel as he hung suspended in the air, slowly being lowered to their level.

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But as the rope gave out further and further, the roars gradually died away and by the time Daniel's feet touched the bottom, there was a silence as of death in the pit and not a lion moved a hair.

The people were awe-stricken and terrified. "Swing the top stone into place," shouted the perplexed keeper, and slowly the slaves pulled the heavy iron lever which moved the great stone until it was secure over the top of the pit and the people could see no more.

Silently the crowd moved away as a guard advanced and sealed the stone with the royal signet and bade the keepers set a watch that no friend came to rescue Daniel. Then they all dispersed to their homes, wondering if his God would save him, or whether he would be destroyed by morning.

As the first gray streaks of dawn peeped over the distant hills, the garden was again alive with an excited crowd. King Darius, with a guard of soldiers bearing torches, and followed by a large number of his court, among whom were the very men who had accused Daniel and who had now come to witness his horrid death, entered the garden in all haste and came to the lions' den. In a shaking voice the King commanded the seals to be broken, and the heavy top stone swung off the mouth of the pit. And then as all was black as ink down in that hole, which no torch could light from that distance, and as no voice or roar of man or beast broke that awful stillness, the King cried in terror, the tears streaming down his face, "Oh, Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"

And out of the depths of the darkness of the den, came the clear, ringing voice of the man who feared God, and so had no fear of man or beast, "O, King, live forever! My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O King, have I done no hurt."

The King nearly fell into the den himself in his joy, and he shouted to the attendants to send down a rope and bring Daniel up. As soon as it was done he turned to the shaking accusers of Daniel, and ordered them

cast into the very pit they had digged for Daniel's feet, and as they fell the lions sprang towards them and devoured them, before ever they reached the bottom.

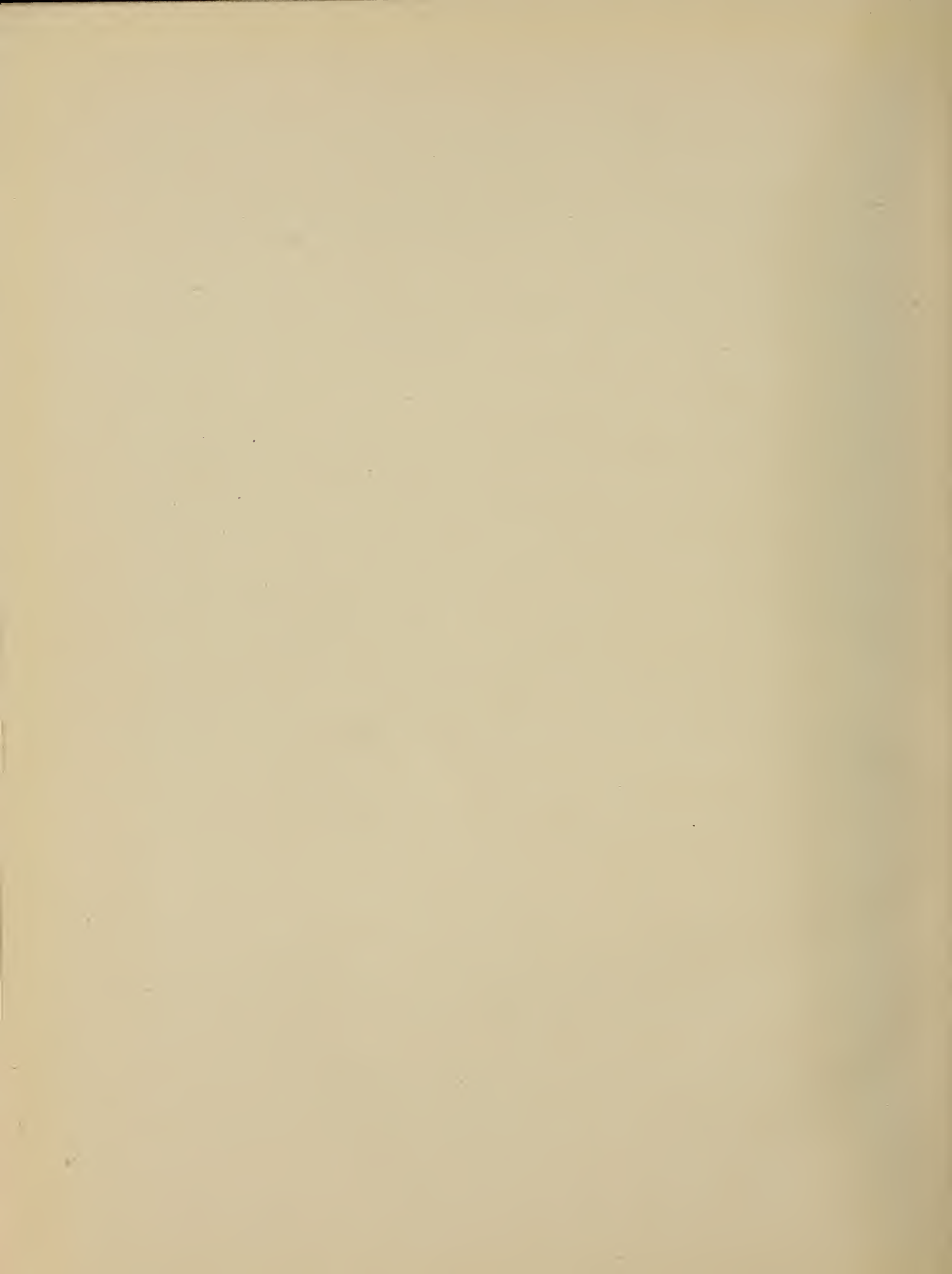
So the King, through Satan's influence, put Daniel in the den of lions, and God, through the power of His angels, kept Daniel safely there and brought him out again to give him even higher honors than ever before, and to cause men throughout all the world to know the keeping power of the most high God

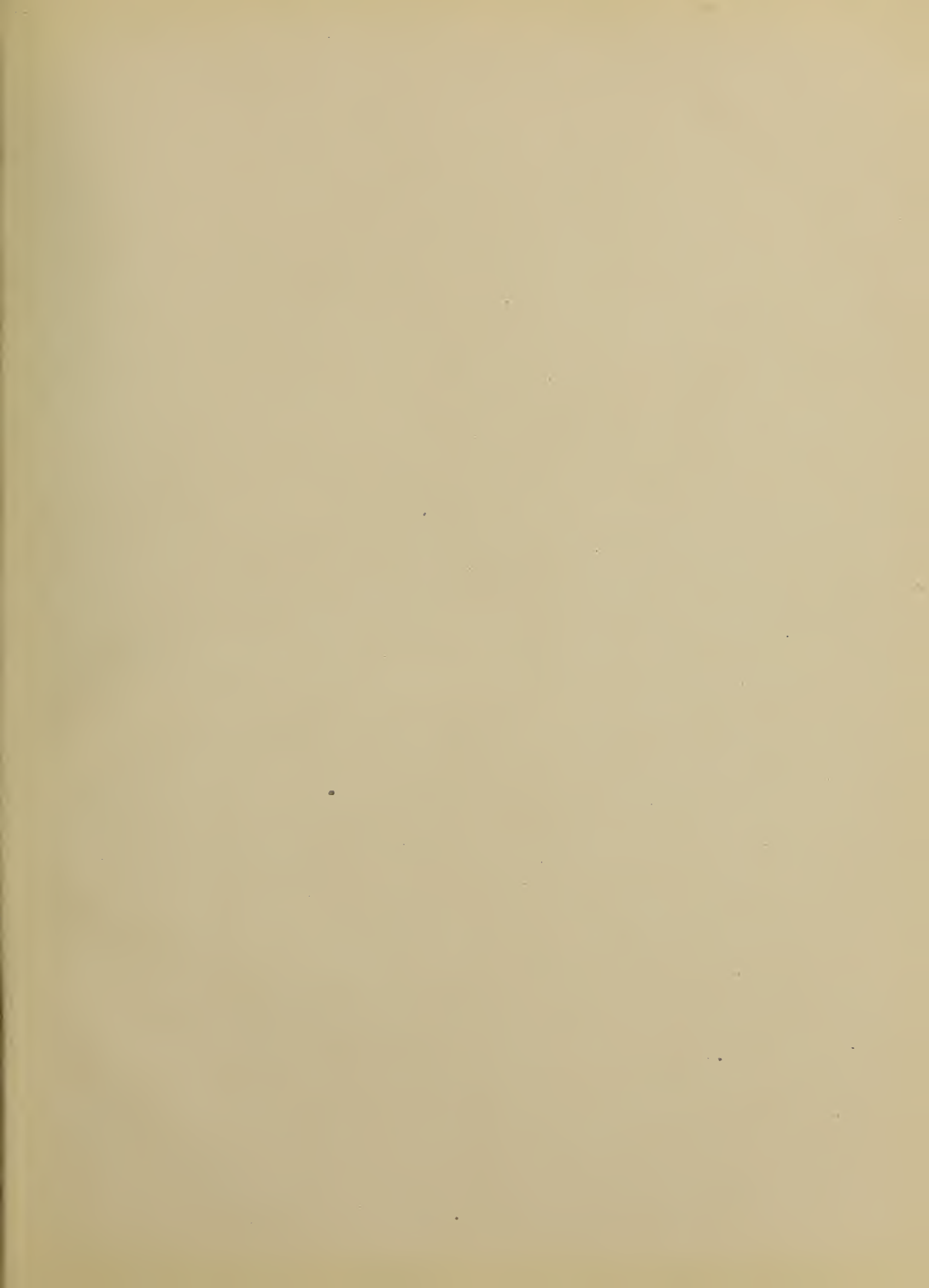
When we are tempted to do wrong, and everything seems against us, let us remember that God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

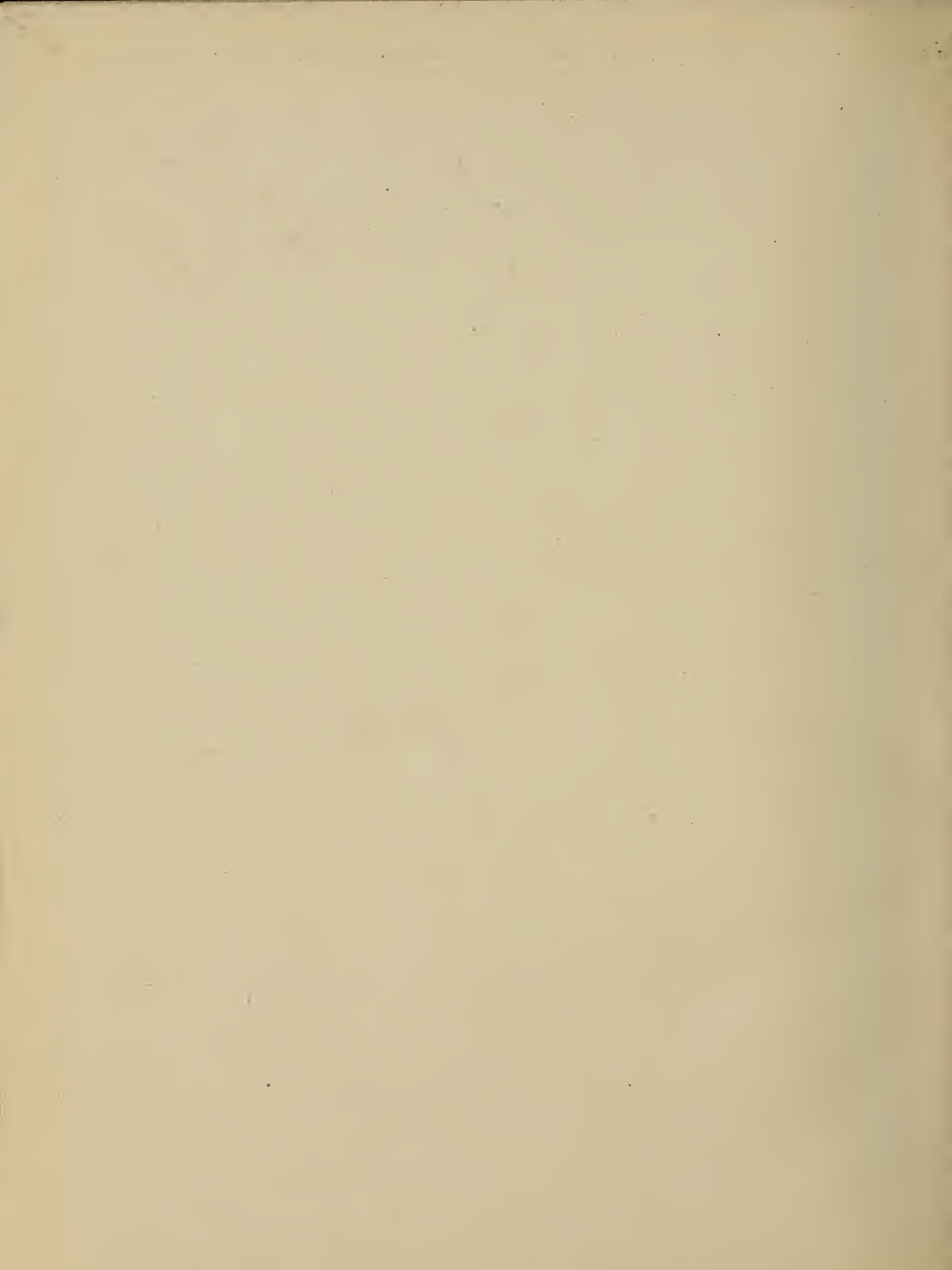
Today we know that He speaks to us through His Word, not in miracles as He did to these men, but these miracles are written in His Word for us to believe and to take comfort from.

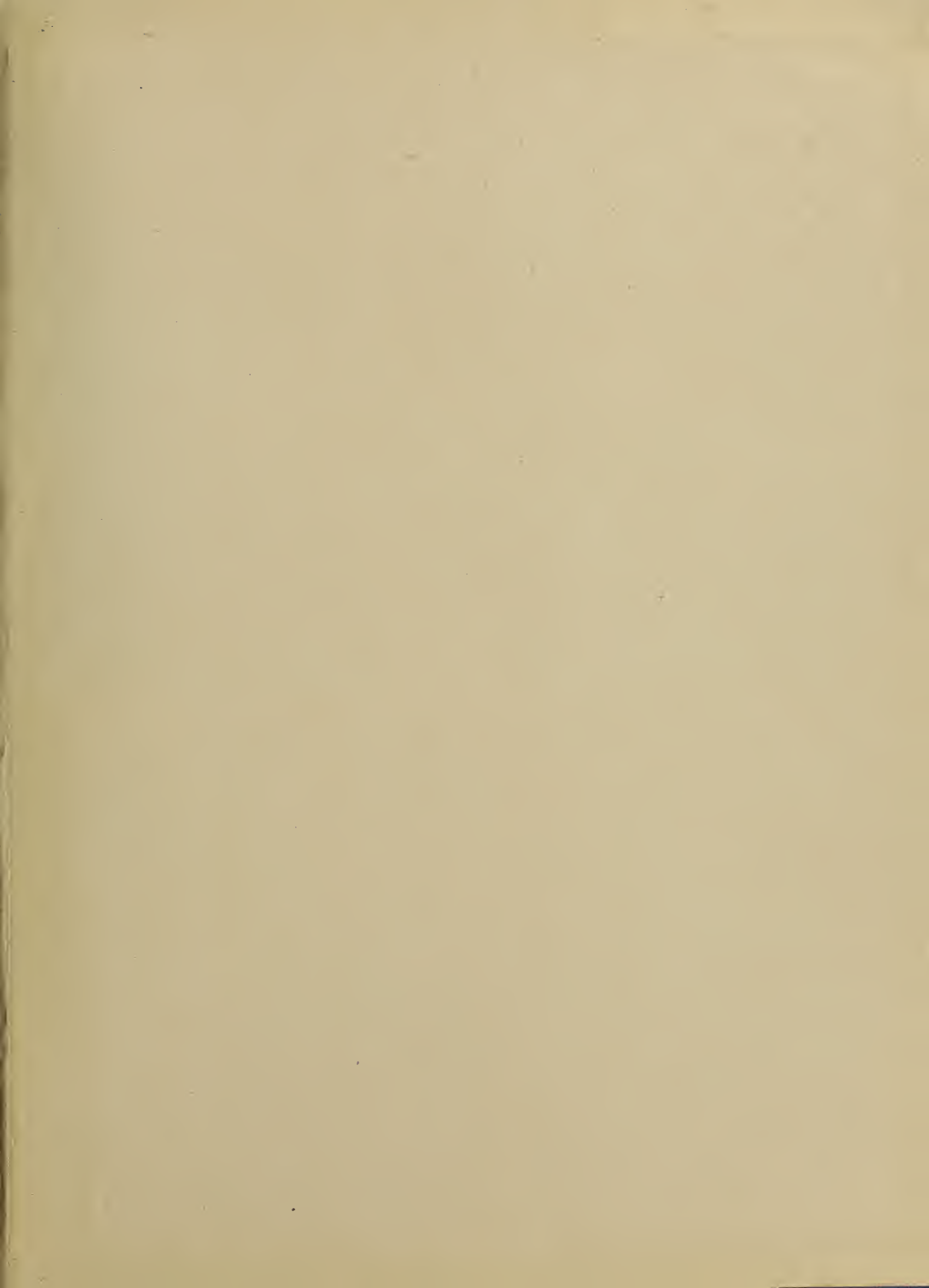
His word today is in His Book, the Bible, and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God's only Son has told us that "God so loved the world that He sent Him, His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

If we believe this, we, with Joseph, David, Daniel and all the others, can boldly say "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me."









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